

CONFIDENTIAL

FILE NUMBER TWO

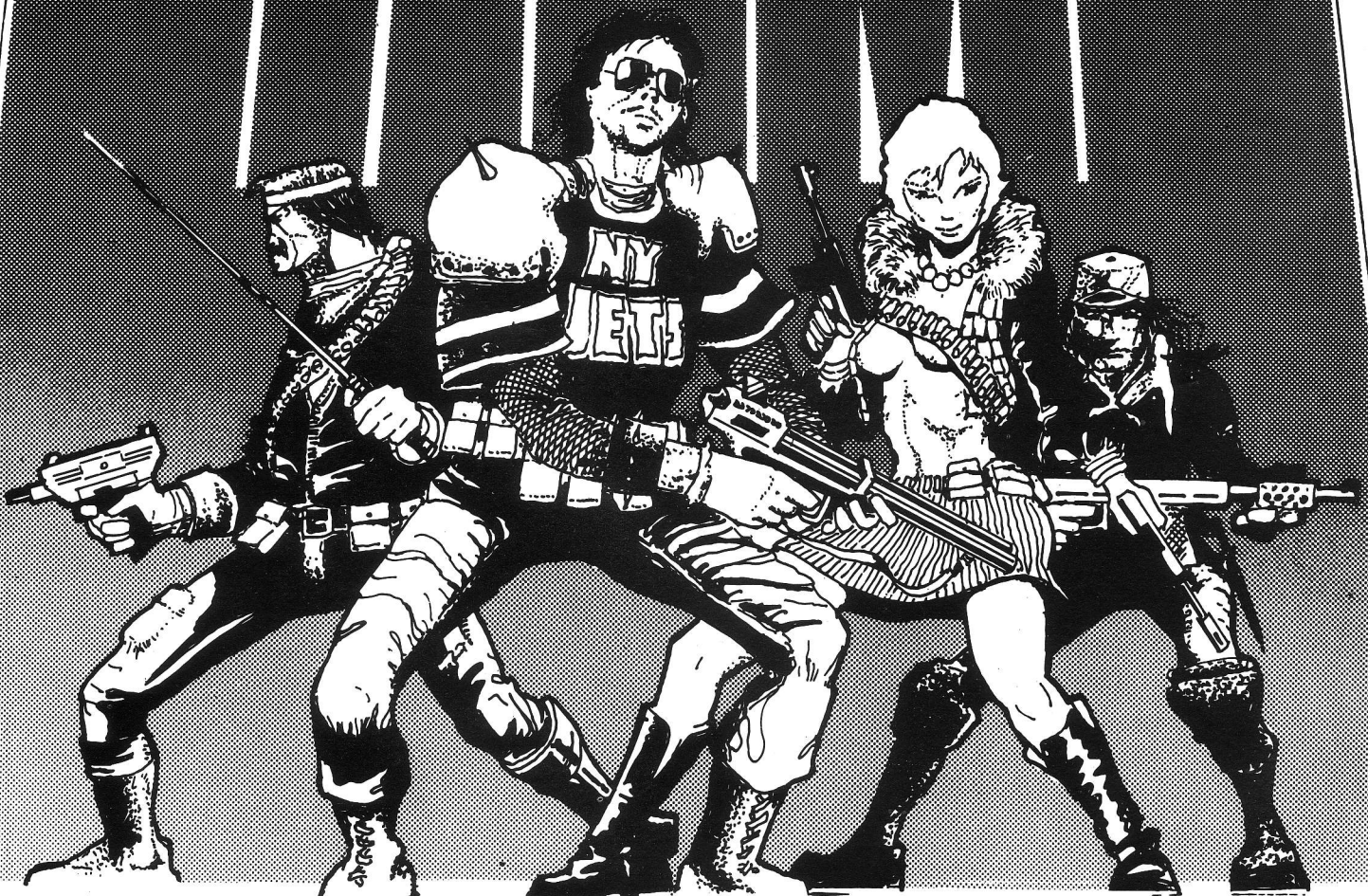
December/January 1988-9
Members' Eyes Only

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Contents

- Psst...** **Page 2**
The Master Spy gets a chance to explain away a whole missing month. Well, who likes November anyways?
- The Exxos Set** **Page 3**
Across the water, a new divinity has been born. His name is Exxos and Clive Weatherley thinks you will be hearing a lot more of His Word in the coming year.
- Encountering Adventures** **Page 6**
John Trevillian, our very own Adventure addict, gets out his shears and turns his hand to cutting a beginner's path through the maze of adventuring.
- Behind Closed Doors...** **Page 8**
In the first of a two-part article on the PC Show, Nick Walkland finds some interesting uses for five Adventure Columnists, a mile of magnetic tape and a microphone.
- Tales From MUD** **Page 11**
The Multi-User Dungeon rides again and is this time ridden by Iz the Wizard, who talks candidly with Richard Bartle, co-author and Arch-Wiz himself.
- What's In A Puzzle** **Page 14**
Keith Campbell dons his beard and glasses for a look at the problems and tasks that make up the backbone of every adventure game.
- Silicon Software** **Page 16**
Down on the south coast, John Trevillian searches out Silicon Software's hideout and snoops on a few conversations.
- Personnel File** **Page 18**
Agent Kane opens the dossier on Peter Wright, author of the controversial Spycatcher book.
- Pool Of Radiance** **Page 19**
More than just another review, as Pat Winstanley delves into the workings of this much-awaited game.
- The Bestiary File** **Page 21**
Are you forever getting eaten by monsters in the darker places of your adventure game? Well help is at hand in the shape of the Bestiary File! Never again need you fear the dark.
- Bixby...By Rob.** **Page 21**
A new cartoon that will add a subtle twist to every command you type forever more!
- On The Case** **Page 22**
This month, we send Agent Walkland to Blackpool and receive a dirty postcard.
- MYTH Update** **Page 24**
Maeve Kane gets her teeth into a gobful of problems in our exclusive Magnetic Scrolls mini-adventure.
- Confidential Papers** **Page 26**
This issue, we bring you June Rowe's prize-winning short story; Harry's Heaven.
- The Crazy Dwarf** **Page 28**
On orders to infiltrate this LRP Club, Agent Morko finds that bravery is not all it's cracked up to be...
- Real Life Blues** **Page 30**
Michael Bywater ponders upon the facts of life and how to tackle them.
- Puzzle Page** **Page 31**
Wrap your brains around these two little mind-numbing problems and win some money-off vouchers.
- For Your Eyes Only** **Page 32**
The Man In Black empties his postbag in the general direction of the letters file.
- WIN £500!** **Inside Back Cover**
Yes that hardware is still up for grabs, so start sending your solutions in straight away in our easy-to-enter competition!

...THESE TICKER-TAPE MESSAGES THAT YOU WILL SEE ARE MY ORDERS SENT OUT TO MY AGENTS WHO WORK ON THIS MAGAZINE...WATCH THEM WELL...

Psst... A WORD FROM THE MASTER SPY

"OYEZ! OYEZ! READ ALL ABOUT IT! PICKETS LOSE NOVEMBER IN MYTHING MAG SHOCK HORROR SENSATION!"

"There's a few days before the copy deadline, just pop it in first class post."

Mail order companies and the people who work for them rely on the good services of the Post Office for their livelihood. Owners of fledgling mail order companies who've committed their life savings to a mail order advertising campaign are 'unlucky' if the entire postal service is disrupted by a strike just as the advert-bearing magazines hit the streets. The pickets at Harlow and Chelmsford said it was the management's fault and eagerly got out some bits of paper to prove it.

"Would you cross your brothers, (comrades), picket line?" they said. "Would you sign away your employment rights?" they said.

The management at Harlow seem to agree with the pickets, "We were told to do it by Head Office", said the man in charge, "We're sorry if it disrupts your business. We don't like to do that cos your business is our business." How astute!

So I blamed the senior management, but when I tried to speak to *them*, they were too busy!

DOING WHAT?

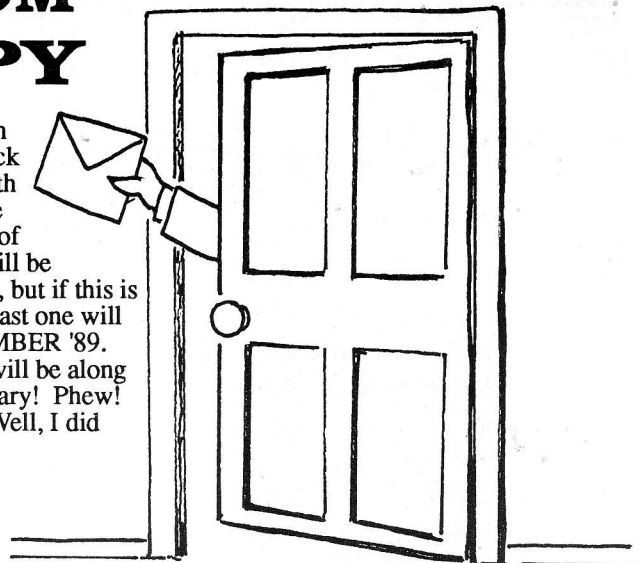
While we twiddled our thumbs waiting for the Posty to arrive with some orders, the copy for CONFIDENTIAL Issue One sat in some postbag in Glasgow. We couldn't duplicate it because the pictures were one-offs. The printer made a special effort when they got it, but they put all 2000 copies on a slow carrier to Timbuktoo and we chased it around the country for two weeks, before it turned up at the beginning of October. We hope you enjoyed it and beg forgiveness for its late arrival.

This issue bears the cover date DECEMBER/JANUARY and *should* be with you in early December. The first issue was for SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER, so what happened to November???

Well there is *NO* - vember, but from now on there will be an issue at the beginning of every other month...

except next October when we'll bring everything back into line by taking a month off. So... if you had Issue One, then your last issue of this year's subscription will be AUGUST/SEPTEMBER, but if this is your first issue, then the last one will be NOVEMBER/DECEMBER '89. The next Buyer's Guide will be along at the beginning of February! Phew! "Where's my MYTH?" Well, I did warn you!

TMS...



I hope you like the new layout for the magazine, as we seem to have acquired a new production team. Well, I say 'seem to have' when what I actually mean is 'forced to have', seeing as the last lot are now the bridge supports for the new section of the M11. Still, hopefully we can now get moving and begin to cover a wider range of topics.

We are hoping to broaden our outlook so as to cover each and every club member that we have. But to do this we need your support and input, otherwise this magazine will follow just what we want! If you feel like complaining about this issue, please let us know what you would include instead. Hopefully soon we can bring out the Club atmosphere and begin to bring everyone together.

Input does not only come in letters, for we also need help in other areas. Below I have listed some of them. Feel free to suggest any others as you see fit.

Personnel File - this needs some more people to interview. Do you wish to know more about Anita Sinclair? Or even fictitious characters. We can track them down and give you all the details you want.

The Bestiary File - any monsters giving you problems? Or are you an expert on how to approach a famous adventure creation? Whether it's asking or informing us, we would like to hear from you.

Confidential Papers - Have we any budding authors out there? If so send in your stories and we will do our best to fit them in.

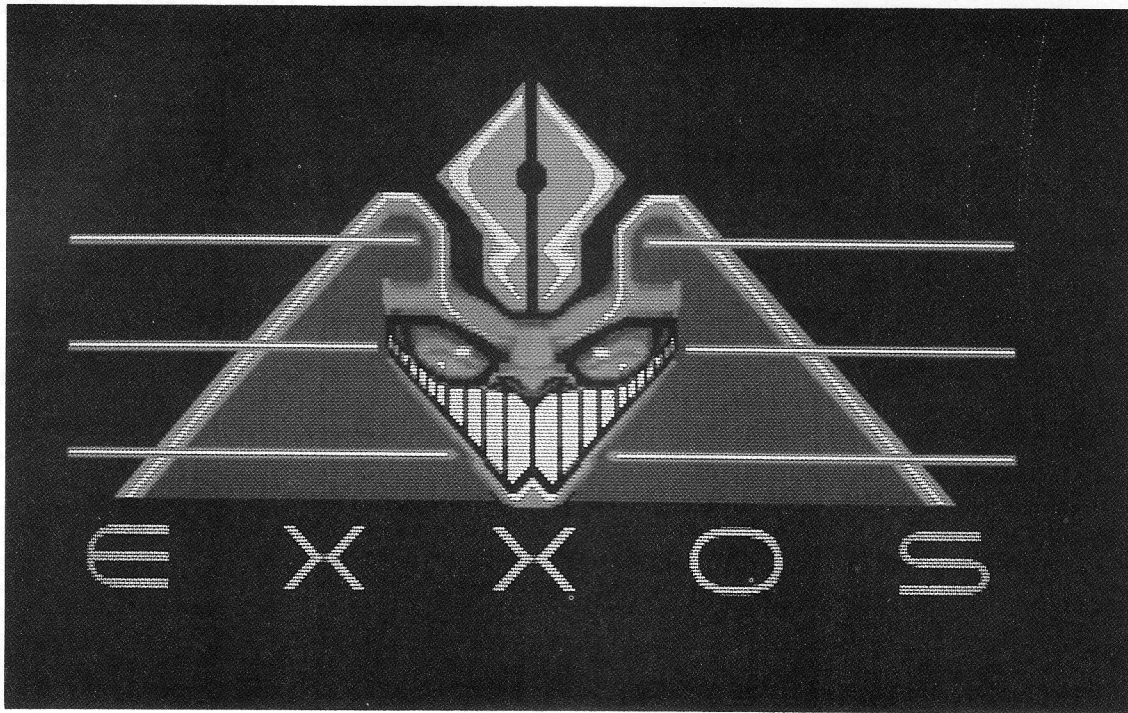
The Dead LetterBox - Your very own notice and bulletin board, for the use of everyone to contact, help and request - or any other use you can think of.

Articles - If you have a special request for an article or feature, then tell us and we'll get our squad of agents on it right away. No news is too hot, no story too new.

I hope to read your comments, criticisms and suggestions very soon!

...TO START THIS ISSUE WE NEED SOMETHING ABSOLUTELY, ONE-HUNDRED PERCENT EXCLUSIVE...ANY CHANCE, AGENT WEATHERLEY?...

You want exclusives? We've got 'em. Never before featured in a British publication, this lot. In the first of two reports on French programming teams, Clive Weatherley dusts off his Berlitz and flies to Paris to meet an explosive and dynamic new force in the computer games market. So explosive, in fact, he likes to think of them as...



THE EXXOS SET

Philippe Ulrich, or Jean-Philippe Ulrich as his name appears in full on his assortment of business-cards, is heavily into haute cuisine. Never happier than when he's seeing an assemblage of carefully researched ingredients coming together to produce a work of the highest culinary art, he is currently revelling in his latest concoction, EXXOS, a collection of games that will satisfy the palates of all but the finickiest of adventure gourmets.

This particular minority are the type prone to argue that a game is not a true adventure unless the player has to crawl south, wait twice, climb down, and then run west eighteen times before being allowed to examine the first tattered parchment, hitting, at all times, on the exact vocabulary, syntax and order demanded by the programmer. For this school of player, Ulrich has no time. But for those who recognise that there are an infinity of other fascinating, stylish and state-of-the-art techniques of communicating one's wishes to a computer, while still allowing a rich scenario and a set of problems of a bewildering complexity, read on.

Philippe Ulrich is the creative brain and soul behind EXXOS, the new arm

of ERE Informatique, the French software house behind such arcade successes as *Bubble Ghost*, *Spidertronic* and *Macadam Bumper*, all distributed by their associate company Infogrammes. He works as co-director of ERE, along with the unassuming, behind-the-scenes figure of Emmanuel Viau. "Emmanuel is the businessman, the commercial brain. I have nothing to do with that side of the work, but provide the imagination, the ideas" says Ulrich, a gentle and enigmatic character, possessing more than a smidgeon of Gallic style and wit. Each time I have met him he has been dressed in black, once in a black designer suit, high-collar shirt and army boots, and this time with a vibrant red scarf breaking his sombre sartorial monotony, staying in place as though sewn to his neck. In ERE's modern office block in the Parisian suburb of Ivry, he shows me around the glass-walled rooms, gliding round as if on casters. When we finally end up in Ulrich's office, it is clear that EXXOS is the current Big Thing at ERE, every available surface, shelf, box, desk and chair carrying the distinctive EXXOS logo or some piece of EXXOS ephemera. But just what is EXXOS? Well, it's not a programming team as such, and most certainly not a

label that will merely be slapped onto selected titles. It is, in actual fact, a... well, more of a... sort of a... erm, Philippe?

"It is not easy to describe what EXXOS is, but it is definitely not just a fancy name for a few computer games. Think of EXXOS more of a divinity, a power that inspires our development team and shapes their creative thoughts."

You mean like one of the nine Muses in Greek mythology?

"Yes, exactly. I like that analogy, computer games being perhaps the tenth avenue of the arts. It also gets across the Classical atmosphere of the concept of EXXOS, the idea that it has been around for eternity. And the name itself has Greek roots."

The name, in fact, comes from the Greek prefix *exo* meaning 'out', the opposite of *eso* which always signifies the internal and the hidden. This choice reflects the ultimate aim of the people behind EXXOS, that of total universal communication, as seen in the first release *Captain Blood*. Paradoxically, this game was *not* inspired by the power: rather, its original con-



cept and scenario led to the spawning of EXXOS itself.

"There was too much good in *Captain Blood* to restrict it to only one game, and I'm not talking here about sequels" (although a *Captain Blood 2* is scheduled for December 1989). "Communication was the key and is at the heart of EXXOS. Everybody should be able to play, to enjoy and to share in the warmth and goodness of him. This led us to create the logo and the whole concept of EXXOS."

The logo is undeniably clever. Almost glowing in a shocking electric blue and gleaming white, it incorporates the three horizontal bars at the base of the original ERE logo, as well as the grinning blue head of EXXOS himself (should that be Himself?). On the top of his head he sports a pretty nifty piece of wordplay: a plume, as in the feathered variety often worn by emperors and deities, but represented in the form of a pen-nib, *plume*, for all non-Francophones, being the French for 'fountain-pen': writing, communication, geddit? His weird grin symbolises pleasure and leisure mixed with a little mystery, and the overall triangular form conjures up pyramids, harping back to the Classical again. Now, if anyone can name another software house with a logo that shows more ingenuity and creativity, I'll eat my *chapeau*.

So, if getting the message across to any Tom, Jacques or Heinrich, whether they be Earth-based or otherwise, is the key motivation behind the foundation of EXXOS, couldn't the more cynical among us argue that the concept is merely a clever ploy to maximise the commercial success of adventure-type releases? *Captain Blood*, as an example, has enjoyed a phenomenal success worldwide and required a minimal amount of translation work in the programming itself to allow this universality. Isn't EXXOS

just another of the many icon-driven development teams trickling out of France at the moment?

"No, no, no," answers Philippe, who has just lifted a grotesquely colourful decapitated alien head from atop a filing cabinet and placed it alarmingly on the desk in front of me. "The commercial aspect is not central to EXXOS. He is too magnificent to concern himself with such trivia. Allowing everyone, no matter what race, nationality or species, to share in his pleasure is EXXOS's prime consideration. Remember: EXXOS is good for you!"

I smile politely, not able to bring myself to let him know that this particular slogan makes Ulrich's new concept sound more like a cross between Domestos and Guinness than a force in leisure software. Instead I play devil's advocate again and ask why, then, the titles are all in English.

"English is the nearest we can get to a universal language in real terms. All the kids understand it: they know 'captain', they know 'blood', they know 'Macadam' (?!). English and American are still very fashionable among the young in France." No doubting that: spend any amount of time with a bunch of French teenagers and you're sure to hear "Oh sheet" pronounced more times than "Bonjour". All the same, I would still like to have seen the games in the shops bearing titles sounding not unlike the Exxosian "Ata ata hoglo hulu", the mantra that each member of the development team reportedly chants before each creative meeting.

The key characters in this team, alongside Ulrich himself, are all salaried by ERE but work mostly from the solitude of their homes, sometimes as farflung from the Paris office as Cannes and Nice. Didier Bouchon was Ulrich's partner in the creation of *Captain Blood*, providing the superb

graphics for this and EXXOS's second release *Purple Saturn Day*. Remi Herbulot worked on the scenario of the latter, and has written many of ERE's past hits. Michel Rho acts as Artistic Director, and the team is completed by Dublanche, Doireau, Le Scoarnec, Decroix, Garofolo and, wait for it, Arbeit von Spacekraft (remember *Crash Garrett*?). All are total converts to EXXOS and think, apparently, on the same wavelength.

One of the rare occasions when the team are seen together happened quite recently at the Parisian Festival de la Micro, when the customary sobriety of France's equivalent to the PC Show was broken, quite literally and quite spectacularly, by the staged launch of EXXOS. At a sizeable press conference held in the middle of the Champs Elysées, a green-haired Ulrich together with his cohorts sporting similarly colourful coiffures, treated the journalists to a lengthy speech, singing the praises of their new-found deity. The climax of the event came when Ulrich produced a sledgehammer and proceeded to smash up a gigantic (faked) computer terminal with it, as a mortal sacrifice to EXXOS. The resulting fragments were, surprisingly perhaps, snapped up by the crowd, all clearly hungry for souvenirs of such a momentous event. I can't really see the British computer hacks reacting with quite so much enthusiasm, but their views on EXXOS's virtual debut *Purple Saturn Day* should make interesting reading early in the new year. Ulrich led me to an adjoining office full of screens and elaborately futuristic pencil sketches, and gave me a sneak preview of his *oeuvre*.

Purple Saturn Day was originally to have been called *Art Attack*, but even Ulrich apparently found this just a tad too aesthetically oriented for a high-tech computer game. State-of-the-Art Attack, yes, but the original two-word title may have caused confused retailers to stack it next to *Paintbox* and *OCP Art Studio*. Instead, the new name gets right to the point scenario-wise: once a year on the planet Saturn a sort of galactic Aurora Borealis takes place, turning the surrounding skies a groovy shade of purple. To celebrate this phenomenon, an annual mini-olympiad of four challenging 'sporting' events is held on the purple day between the best specimens of the various races that inhabit neighbouring planets. Only one of these races is human, the others comprising weird and wonderful creatures, all with strengths and weaknesses that will influence your choice of opponent for each individual event. And the events? Some of the most awesome gameplay and graphics I've seen, and parallax scrolling that I wouldn't have thought the ST capable of. Ring-Pursuit involves a race around the rings of

Saturn, avoiding meteors while gently nudging your opponent into their path, and passing on the correct side of orbiting satellites; Tronic-Slider (is this a pun on *Spidertronic*?), an energy-hunt set in a sort of extraterrestrial boxing ring festooned with a network of shimmering monoliths to scoot round; Time-Jump, a hairy contest in which you strive to catapult yourself the furthest into the future; and the *pièce de résistance*, Brain-Bowler: in an exploded brain you fight to reactivate your particular cerebral hemisphere before your adversary activates his. If you're wondering where the familiar slice of rumpy-pumpy obligatory to all French games comes in, then wonder no more: on the final screen the overall winner of the tournament gets to, er, kiss and cuddle, shall we say, with the beautiful female life-form who just happens to be kicking her heels on the planet surface. The resulting offspring from this encounter then appears on the screen and - get this - is saved to disk. Play it a few times and the dayglo-yellow planet-face gets pretty crowded with screaming mutant alien infants.

If this all sounds a bit far-removed from adventure games, it is: pure arcade in fact, and doesn't set itself up to be anything else. But it *is* the sort of game that impresses and that the connoisseur of polished 'special' games will find himself returning to again and again. For a more thinking game, adventure fans need only wait for EXXOS's third release, called at this stage *Temple of the Flying Saucers* and featuring role-playing at its most graphic, telepathic communication with psychic mutants and an intricate system of on-screen window-opening and icon commands that needs to be seen to be believed. The scenario certainly lives up to previous titles: it's the third terrestrial millenium, and the Earth is populated by three races: humans, mutants and Tuners (no, not a takeover by Technics, but a clairvoyant hoard of aliens; what you might call a medium wave). The Tuners have begun to kidnap the mutant children and forced them into the slavery of an immense secret society, the Network, which is slowly planning to take over the planet in its particularly evil and occultist way. Raven and Sifai are two such captives, but become separated in their place of capture, the Temple of the title. Raven, along with his fellow prisoners, vows to find Sifai again, thwart the plans of his captors, and ultimately destroy their leader Zork (now where have I heard that name before?). The sneak preview, albeit unfinished, that I saw allowed a bewildering set of options on any one screen, communication with a sexy little foetus, and, as ever, stunning graphics.

As I return to Ulrich's office, he begins

to get excited about another future release, his own baby this one, called *Psyman* (say it Simon). In this, the eponymous hero is a body-switcher, possessing the pretty nifty ability to swap body parts from a bank of five complete corpses that he keeps in the fridge, as the particular situation (Saving The Universe again, I think) demands. A whole new meaning to the term 16-bit, and what I can safely say is the first game character to change his persona simply by raiding the Zanussi. This pinnacle of good taste will be with us mid-89.

The interview draws to a close, and just as we prepare to shoot off to a brasserie for lunch, I ask Ulrich for his thoughts on the future of EXXOS. After much musing, his carefully considered answer comes.

"EXXOS has not even begun yet. This is only the initial stage. I see computer games as an art, and in other art-forms, there have always been movements: dadaism, surrealism. Why shouldn't it be like that in software? Pictures are at the heart of the genre after all. EXXOS is raising computer entertainment to the status of high art, and bringing this art-form to everyone in the galaxy."

Yes, Phil, now what about lunch? As we're to be travelling in Ulrich's battered Renault, the first task is to find his car keys, a puzzle that takes a good five minutes to solve and proves a lot more difficult than "get keys". Once they are found, dangling from a filing cabinet, we leave the ERE building, but not before I'm forced to sign the

Golden Book of EXXOS. I write some message in French, about being one of EXXOS's English friends (well, I *was* being hurried), put the 'Ata ata' quote, sign it and draw a quick cartoon of ol' Toblerone-head himself. Joined by Nelly the press assistant, we descend to the underground car-park, with Ulrich's car immediately detectable by the bright blue plumes adorning the two front headrests. Sitting in the passenger seat, I feel slightly self-conscious driving through Paris, knowing that I have a gleaming turquoise pen-nib sticking out of my head. My mind is soon on other things, however, namely Ulrich's driving style and the fact that I'm too young to die. At least I now realise the original inspiration behind the terrifyingly hairy canyon-flight sequences in *Captain Blood*; it's not the Ark of Blood you're piloting, it's the Renault of Ulrich.

All in all, the visit convinced me that EXXOS is a genuinely exciting concept, but one that would sound ridiculous and corny were it not for the total commitment and enthusiasm of the individual members of the team behind it. Ulrich has the creativity and the contacts (if his Filofax falls open at J, you might just see the number of a certain Jean-Michel Jarre, a friend from Ulrich's rockstar days) to pull it off. *Blood* is an unquestionably hard act to follow by anyone's standards, but with the EXXOS team's determined concentration on seeing the games market develop and attain new levels of excellence, their chances for similar success must be high. Until then, Ata ata hoglo hulu...



...YOUR MISSION SHOULD YOU WISH TO ACCEPT IT IS TO TACKLE THE PLETHORA OF ADVENTURE GAMES...MISSION IMPOSSIBLE?...



ENCOUNTERING ADVENTURES

A SELF-HELP GUIDE THROUGH THE MAZE OF ADVENTURE GAMING

Whether you are a hardened campaigner or the solver of every title, a beginner or just plain stupid, Adventures always strike people as a curious breed of games. They pit players against tasks that are stacked harshly against them and then expect them to come running back for more. Why is this? What madness would possess you to repeat all that suffering again - and pay for the privilege? Hopefully in these few paragraphs, I can throw some light into this darkened corner and offer a word or two of good advice.

GETTING AROUND TO BUYING A GAME...

Well, there are certainly enough to



choose from, ranging from the ever-popular medieval themes to Science Fiction, Horror and all manner of other genre. The best way to home-in on any particular title is to decide what your preferred reading field is and then try an adventure which mirrors this preference. One point to note here: if your answer to this question is 'Janet And John', please stop reading now.

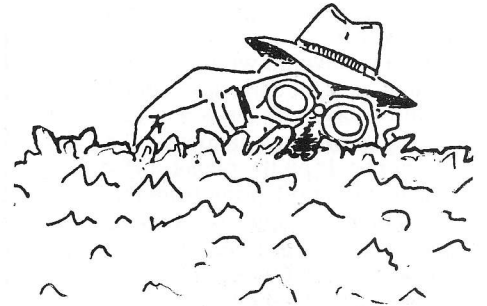
WADING THROUGH THE PACKAGING...

So, you arrive home and force your fingers through the indestructable plastic covering, shred them, scream, rip open the box (forgetting the sticky tape and managing to rip the box asunder in the process) and finally smother your bedroom with enough packaging to sink the Titanic. Tish, you think I jest! Here you are in the realm of psychedelic paper, warranty forms, 65-

page novellas, instruction manuals, loading instructions, newspapers, badges, stickers, posters, hintsheet details, beer mats, maps, diagrams, strange revolving wheels covered with numbers, pictures of the tanned programmer swanning about in some tropical tax haven, wierd plastic viewers that must be placed over the screen before you can see the text and much more besides! And the most frustrating thing is it's all absolutely essential to finish the game! The only way to deal with this is to take out a series of night courses in speed reading. Hopefully, if you buy the game on a Friday night, you should get to snatch a few minutes' play sometime before going to work on Monday morning.

PLAYING THE GAME...

So you have picked the perfect game (and what's wrong with 'Mutant Death Monkeys From The Planet Nim?') and have filed away the plethora of papers in both your brain and filing cabinet (Ah, I see they've included a life-sized blow-up copy of the actual planet on which the adventure takes place. How handy!), so you are ready to begin the awesome task of actually playing the game. And if you thought you already had troubles, you ain't seen nothing yet, buster. Adventure games are written for the same reason that the Marquis de Sade



invited friends around to dinner and the sooner you realise this the better. As soon as you react to the first description, it's 'You vs Them' in a match which will induce insomnia, endless worry and bitten fingernails (to name a few of the the minor problems). I am still waiting to discover a little memo in amongst all the other packaging from the programmer saying: "To Whom It May Concern, This is gonna hurt you far more than it's gonna hurt me. Love and kisses, A Friend." But after experiencing first-hand these mind-mangling ordeals, all



I can say is, I'm hooked. So read the scrawl below and digest my tips on how to survive these self-inflicted trials by parser.

1. **Play after dark.** The best adventuring is done at about twelve minutes to one o'clock in the morning. Do not

even consider playing adventures in broad daylight, though it may be worthwhile when cloudy. Use the daylight hours to sleep and catch up with all that unread game packaging you still have to file.

2. Read all the descriptions very carefully.

The programmer may have left juicy clues in the wording of the game. Psychologists that I have talked to conclude that by analysing the text you can catch a glimpse of what the writer was thinking at the time (by checking word formation and metaphor), thus giving you a very important and scientifically sound base



the costume of the King of Rumblovia and solve the game), use the full list of prepositions. Who knows if that innocent laundry basket may be hiding something much more sinister in, on, under, behind, next to, over, squeezed down the back of - or even secreted in the false bottom of - its wicker frame. Of course, in real life, when you see a table, you also see what is on it; but adventures, as I have stated before, do not compare with real life at all. Oh no, wait a moment...Scrub that. There is one fundamental similarity. Adventures may be compared to real life on one basic level -

money...

7. Coping with addiction (or 'Adventures vs Bank Balances'). As in real life, where everything costs money, adventures are just the same: they cost money too. There is no way to get around this (without getting locked up), though costs can be cut down by attempting alternatives to adventure, such as sticking a sharp stick in your eye. As an alternative, this can only be used a couple of times, but the stick always comes in handy later when your guide dog arrives (an interesting point: do they do adventures in braille, I wonder..?)

So to sum up: Never buy adventure games unless you are a literate masochist. Make sure that you have at least two filing cabinets, access to unlimited amounts of pens, paper and time and try to arrange large unconditional loans from your Bank Manager prior to seeing your psychologist.. And if you do fall into the slimey trap of adventure gaming, beware of the harsh realities of these most bizarre, frustrating and thoroughly enjoyable games.

All the hinted games and plotlines in this article are totally fictitious and any resemblance to any existing games and plotlines, either living or dead, is purely coincidental.



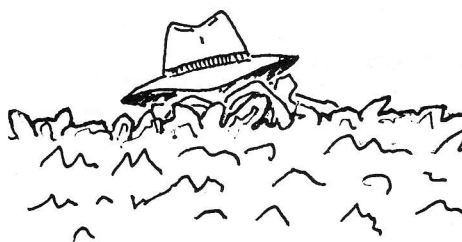
with which to plot what is going to happen next. Does the text suddenly mention words such as 'dark' or 'black' or 'shadowy'? Yes? Then look out for something lurking around the next few locations hereabouts. Perhaps the rambling style suddenly changes to tight uninformative scribble. Watch out for an unexpected attack. Or do new and potentially soul-destroying phrases like 'metaphysical propensity' leap off the screen and straight at your throat? This means the programmer (or Interactive Author, as they are known in the trade) has found his the-saurus; start to panic.

3. Silliness often brings results. A classic case of this occurs when a frog suddenly hops into your location. Naturally you waste no time giving it a big wet kiss and usually for your troubles you get a response such as, 'What are you, some kind of pervert?'. But occasionally some of the more helpful adventures go on to say: 'The frog looks slightly ill and says: Hey, gimme a break. Now what I really need is an alligator sandwich. Any chance, mac?' 'Hmmm...well, I said silliness brought results, not made any sense of the illogical problems.

4. Be familiar with your surroundings. Geography may be structured in such a way as to be helpful. Watch out

for such tantalising text passages as 'Out of the northern window, between the rippling lace curtains, you catch a glimpse of a lone turret peeping over the faraway hills.' Note all exits, especially those which are hidden. Here is another grey area of adventure writing; where to put the secret passage. This problem is usually solved by putting it in the tree stump, but occasionally you find them in the oddest of places. Always check chimneys, panelled walls, dead ends, toilet fittings and even behind such things as barrels, boxes and dragons. When in doubt, try sitting inside any of the objects that can contain you. This does nothing to solve the adventure, but is a good idea if you feel suddenly at a loose end.

5. Make a map. This is easier said than done in most cases, especially where mazes are concerned. The best



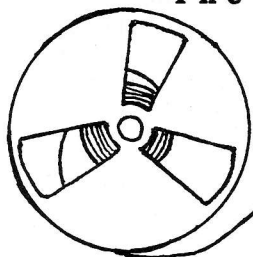
way to approach this topic is to start in the centre of the page and write small. As far as mazes are concerned, these may be physically impossible. Remember, the laws of physics and adventure games hardly ever mix.

6. Examine everything. A tedious pastime maybe, but essential all the same. This includes reading all notes, letters and encyclopaedias left lying around by the unseen bookworms that seem to populate such games as this. Also remember, in your search for that elusive sock (the final and most important part of garb required to complete

...AGENT WALKLAND...GET IN HERE...ALL THIS EXPENSIVE BUGGING EQUIPMENT GOING TO WASTE...FIND A USE FOR IT!...

The 'OFFICIAL SECRETS' team of spies bring you:

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS AT THE PC SHOW



The following conversation took place in a forgotten press room somewhere in the darker recesses of this year's PC Show. There gathered five of the best Adventure columnists, brought together to speak to Nick Walkland in an exclusive interview with **CONFIDENTIAL**. The words they muttered in that room were confessed to secrecy, but little did they know that our spies had the whole place bugged! So gaze on, gentle reader, for a glimpse at what the professionals say about the topics of Adventuring. Those present included:

NWkd - Nick Walkland, the Mata Hari of the computer world.

KC - Keith Campbell, well-known Adventure game columnist for *C&VG* and *Commodore User*.

MG - Mike Gerrard, freelance journalist and Adventure writer for *Your Sinclair*.

SC - Steve Cooke, erstwhile editor of *ACE* and the man behind countless Adventure writing facades.

NW - Nik Wilde, Newsfield's rising star and adventure writer under various pseudonyms.

KH - Kati Hamza, *Zzap* and *Crash* reviewer and Adventure columnist.

Okey, Nick, turn on the tape recorder...

-click-

NWkd - What do you like best in Adventures, should be a nice enough place to start with...Anyone?

KC - Money, yeah... Killed that one didn't it?

MG - Lots of gold coins.

NWkd - OK then, the basic question most people ask - Graphics in adventures?

KC - Wh'd'ya want to know about them?

NWkd - Personal feelings?

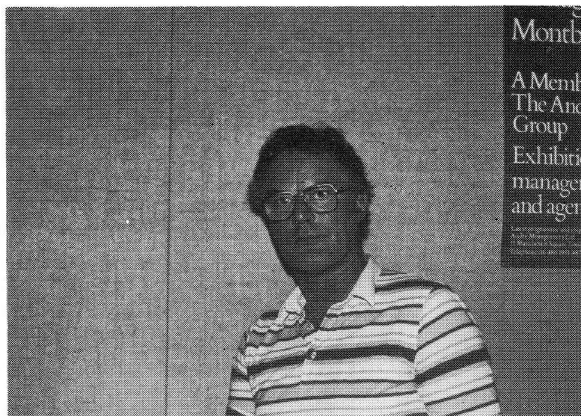
KC - Well, there's graphic adventures and graphic adventures aren't there? Magnetic Scrolls and those sort of things and budget things, which are often a waste of time. Nowadays, they seem to add more atmosphere to them.

SC - I think that question was only relevant about three years ago when we had to make a choice. When we had Graphic and Text and had to make the choice. If you see *Infocom's Shogun* they look great; why not have graphics in adventures?

KC - On the 64 they are a pain, but they add something.

SC - Add atmosphere.

MG - Going back to what Steve was saying - that's it. When everyone was playing adventures on the Spectrum and they only had so much memory, graphics were a waste of time



because they cut down on the actual game. And I think that people who have grown up with graphics in adventures have enjoyed them. I think everyone looks at the pictures, then switches them off. It is something to do. But I don't mind them being there. And if you get good ones, like in the *Magnetic Scrolls* games, then maybe they add to the game.

KC - If they're poor and nothing special about 'em, so long as they are fast, I use them as an aid to see where you are. If you're romping through one location to another and go back somewhere, you don't have to read the text but you identify by the pictures. So they can be useful and more.

MG - Then again, there is a bad side to that, which is the graphics aren't used in every location in a *Magnetic Scrolls* game; you get a graphic every ten locations. And you're, you know, in a field with a bull and there's a cottage on the screen. Y'know, that sort of thing. That's not a criticism of them, because there isn't a lot you can do about it.

SC - I must admit that the *Magnetic Scrolls* graphics, although very lovely to look at, they never do anything for me as far as the game is concerned, but I love looking at them. But take a game like *Shogun*, because it's the only one I've looked at recently, with the Japanese sort of prints. I thought that they did something for the game because it conveyed a sort of culture, and you get a background feel about what you are playing. Whereas, although I really like the graphics in a *Magnetic Scrolls* game - and I'm not saying they shouldn't be there - they're so realistic I can't imagine some things as realistic as that.

KC - But they hold interest, waiting to see what the next one will be like.

SC - Yes, some are really stunning.

NWkd - Are you saying that they distract from the game?

SC - No. I don't think that it distracts, just doesn't actually add. Certainly doesn't distract.

NW - One thing that gets me on *Shogun*, is not being able to turn the graphics off. Especially when they are there most of the time.

KC - What about the *Sierra* games?

SC - More *Space Quest*, *Wizard's Quest* games and those sort of things. I think they're a bit twee, but I really like them.

NWkd - People tend to love them or hate them.

SC - Can be easily evocative, having specialist subject matter pays, like *King's Quest* which is really twee, like a kid-dies' adventure - but actually it's still quite a good game. And





I like the little bits like when you're sweeping up the room and "chu,chu,chu..." - a nice touch and quite funny.

KC - Have you played *Leisure Suit Larry*?

SC - I haven't, no, but I've heard about it.

KC - Oh it's good. The graphics are a nice change too.

NWkd - What do you see as the future of Adventure games? What are they leading to, on the same track or where are they leading?

KC - That they'll tend to merge with role-playing games. Some are doing it already; *Legend of the Sword* and those sort of games.

NWkd - So you're saying that adventures are heading more towards the Hack 'n' Slash rather than the puzzle aspects?

KC - There will still be puzzles there but it'll merge more together. A bit of both in most games.

NW - The Infocom marketing guy was telling me this morning that they are moving more in the direction of *Battletech*, because their market demands this in games. And that's the way it is going in the States - I think it's Mediagenics' influence myself.

NWkd - So it all boils down to marketing?

KH - That's why graphics were there in the first place. Especially Magnetic Scrolls games.

NW - It was also Level 9's excuse for adding graphics, as well.

KH - They've developed separately though, haven't they? I mean, with the graphics, give them a basic idea of the game and then ask them to do it. At the end of the day, they put the graphics on.

KC - There's the question of specialisation though isn't there?

KH - Well yes, but they could be developed in unison.

SC - Develop what in unison?

KH - Graphics and text. The two together in all stages of development.

SC - What can you actually do with text? I would argue that advanced parsers are unnecessary - I don't think people will actually make much use of them and I don't think they make much use of them in the game design. There has rarely been a game when you couldn't have used only a few words. Even in a Magnetic Scrolls game, which we all actually understand, it's great that you can "Take the red mouse out of the green bottle and trap it in the red cage." But nine times out of ten, you don't have to do this at all.

KH - But in my view, it is actually more loyal to use combinations such as striking matches and so on.

SC - I would think that what might happen on that side is that you can replace them like *Legend of the Sword*, for example. I thought that it worked quite well as a little icon thing, although the game itself was nothing to write home about. I never thought while playing it that there was a terrible lack of game play. I have felt that on those Mirrorsoft icon games like *Shadowgate*. They really are limited and I don't have much time for them, but I'm not convinced.

MG - I think the only thing they can now do is to make them more accessible to people who are playing adventures for the first time. I've shown adventures to someone who has never played one before, and said 'Type in what you want to do.' And of course, they type in: 'I want to open the door,' and the

parser replies, 'What? Eh?' The only way to improve is to understand more and more sentences so that anyone can type in anything and will actually get a response and know what he is trying to do.

NWkd - How do you feel towards Multi-User Games and the use of non-player characters, bombing all over the place?

MG - I've got mixed feelings. I was playing a game the other day from a small mail order company called *The Beast* by Linda Wright of Marlin Games. You go through a village where the shops open and close at certain times. When you stand outside the village pub at 11 o'clock, the churchbell rings, the landlord emerges from the door and the first customer of the day walks in, while you stand there watching... And that adds to the game - Ahh, that's nice. Then you go into the pub and have a drink and so on. I find it difficult to interact with the other characters because I never know what to do or to say to them. All you can do is 'Say to dwarf, hello'. You know, 'The dwarf greets you.' sort of thing.

SC - The fact is, in real life, we pass thousands of interactive characters each day. How many do we actually want to interact with? Very few. And it's the same in games. I agree, much better to have two or three who you can really do something with.

KC - Something I found annoying in *Knight Orc* was that there were so many people and villains, and you had to sort out what you really wanted to know from all the rubbish.

NWkd - It looks like one of the trends to cram as many non-player characters into a game as if to say 'Look at this, aren't we clever?' sort of thing. Are you for them?

KC - I think that Level 9's latest one has come back down a bit since then. You've still got loads of characters but not all doing things at once, so you don't know what's going on...

NWkd - What do you really hate to see in adventures? Pet hates?

KC - Bad spelling.

SC - Absolutely.

KC - Also, fatal bugs. Half way through a game, if it has got a bug in it, they've wasted their time. I won't review it.

SC - The other thing I don't like is long location descriptions unless it appears to be written first class. You get them in crappy programs, especially in *G.A.C.*, where you get these long location descriptions where it gives you it all. You know, where it says 'Bloobluboo' and you only see the last sentence - 'You've had it.' 'What? What happened?'

MG - Instant deaths. You're just getting into the game and you type 'East...' "Thhwackk! A landslide has come down the mountain and killed you." Oh great.

NW - Instant deaths is mine too.

KH - Hackneyed pastiche medieval phrases. That really gets me.

NWkd - I personally hate mazes, but there you go.

NW - Also, every location description begins with 'You Are...' I hate that.

SC - Another is when there is an obvious solution to a puzzle, and you know you've got it right but it will only accept one word. You want to get on a boat - Get on boat, board boat, mount boat, enter boat, climb boat, jump boat and you find it is something like 'Embark'.

MG - Or 'East'?



SC - Or east, yes. Arrrrgh!

KC - I was playing a game, *Deadend* for the 64, a two part thing, and he gave me a complete solution. There's a library where you've got to find some information and the actual sentence required was 'Search New York files for information on man.' Rest of the adventure is in two words, except for this. Even then I typed 'Information about.' I sent that one back.

MG - I dislike illogical solutions. I played one where you buy the labourer a drink then press lever to open passage. If you didn't buy him a drink - nothing. Absolutely no connection between the two events at all.

KC - *Castle of Terror* is a bit like that.

MG - Ahh, that's going back a bit...

NWkd - When you're preparing your column, how do you decide on reviews; how many and why?

MG - In *Your Sinclair*, there's certain ones you know that you're going to review, like the Magnetic Scrolls and Level 9 games, because people will buy them and want to hear more about them. Of the rest, I receive far more than I can actually review - I have a quick look at all of them just to get a quick impression. Some of them are definite no-no's, you can tell straight away - NO. Some are definitely yes. Some are in the middle: 'That looks nice, if I've got some room I'll review it.' And then it all depends how many pages I've got left.

KC - I do it the same way. Adventures are a minority market and therefore, if you've got a lot of software - all of it good - you won't get extra pages because of it. Adventure houses hardly give any advertising and the majority of readers aren't into adventures. So it's a really thin line. It's all a matter of fitting space to what is coming out.

MG - It's also getting more difficult because, even on the Spectrum, where you can get say a Magnetic Scrolls game, you can easily do two pages on that when you've only got three pages for reviews anyway. But to do that game justice, you've got to give it lots of space, which means you don't have space for the smaller ones. And there are more games coming out like that and you don't have enough columns to do them all justice.

NW - Lack of space is a problem... I'm afraid I've got an appointment, bye...

NWkd - Oh well, what do you feel about 'arcade adventures'?

KH - Up until now, I've done the Spectrum adventure column in *Crash* and I've just started the *Zzap!* one. I've not had one single adventure this month, but a whole load of borderline arcade ones which don't hold me, unless they're really good, like *Dungeon Master*.

KC - I've always resented the phrase 'arcade adventure' - it seems to me that they were trying to get the best of both worlds when they invented it.

KH - With a lot of these games, it seems to be just hitting things until someone gets killed.

NWkd - So we're aiming again towards a Hack 'n' Slash future then?

MG - RPG is going to sort of merge with adventures. That's the future, because that's what most people want. Judging by the letters I receive, anyway.

MG - I liked *Dungeon Master* and *Bard's Tale*, but these are the only two I've enjoyed - mainly because they have some sort of depth to them.

SC - I'm knocked over by *Ultima V*, an absolutely fantastic and different game. There's so much in it. I've put in over sixty hours on it. More than I have for any game for a long

time. I was really surprised because I've played them before a couple of years back and wasn't impressed at all. But I'm taken aback, hundreds of people to talk to in a nice easy way, very easy to converse and it has an enormous amount of play - a good atmosphere as well.

MG - That's the reason I like text adventures because you can get lost in them and do

believe in them. Whereas with the *Ultima* games I had seen, where you're just a figure on an overhead view of a map which you've got to move around in. That doesn't give me any sense of a real world that you would like to be part of.

KC - Two games which have given me a sense of atmosphere and getting involved recently are *Stationfall* and *Lurking Horror*. These absolutely grab you.

SC - *Lurking Horror* is a really superb, first class game.

MG - That's a really good adventure that I've played for ages and ages and ages. That is something, talking about reviewing games: you have so many to review that getting into any particular game is very hard - you don't get much time to do it. So when something like this comes along then I do actually play it night after night after night.

KC - Leaving the copy later and later and later...

MG - Yeah, that's a good sign. Not many come along though.

NWkd - What do you go looking for in an adventure?

MG - It's like reading a book - you give it so many pages. You don't carry on if you're not interested.

NWkd - So the atmosphere keeps you going?

MG - No, different things really, sometimes a game may have a very good background, or text. The introduction to it, in the packaging is a different story, it puts you in a frame of mind for the game before the start. In others, you can explore all over the place before you come to a problem, but if the text is good it is still enjoyable - that's most important.

NWkd - So you like big packaging?

MG - Yeah, that's nice.

NWkd - What about if a small software house went to the trouble of producing a load of bumf?

MG - No, it's different for them. When I say initial impressions it can be like a typed sheet for a scenario - if that's good, well written and different then it says 'play the game and enjoy it.' With home grown games you expect different things, you don't expect free dice and Scratch 'n' Sniff cards. If you receive a cassette box with a handwritten label and nothing much on it and it's tatty, then you think that if they haven't gone to a little bit of trouble presenting it to a glossy magazine for review, chances are the game won't be much good. I still look at it, you know, maybe... They tend not to be.

MG - I like the fact that adventures appeal to men and to women, well not equally, because there aren't as many women interested in computers as there are men. But also young kids through to pensioners - there isn't a typical. I get mail from people in college, housewives, policemen, doctors, and so on. One of my favourites is a retired major.

NWkd - OK then, what is your worst adventure and why?

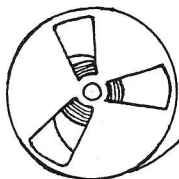
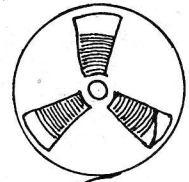
KC - Better stick to the commercial ones I suppose hadn't we?

NWkd - Unless you've seen a real bad one.

MG - But you wouldn't play it.

KC - My worst one at present is...

-click-



And that is where we have to leave this particular tape recording for this issue. But the Adventurer Columnists will be back to discuss in depth the worst games on the market, to dredge up the slime about the horrific bugs in Adventure games, to carp and moan about the anti-climaxes they have had (?), nostalgia, solutions and even how they hack into the USA Defence System in their spare time. All this and more from the concluding transcript in the next **CONFIDENTIAL**.

...AGENT TREVILLIAN!...WHAT'S ALL THIS MUD BUSINESS?...ISN'T IT SOME KIND OF DIRTY UNDERGROUND ESTABLISHMENT...?

TALES FROM MUD

(Including excerpts from an interview with Richard Bartle - ArchWizard and Co-Creator of the Multi-User Dungeon)



Narrow road between lands.

You are stood on a narrow road between The Land and whence you came. To the north and south are the small foothills of a pair of majestic mountains, with a large wall running round. To the west the road continues, where in the distance you can see a thatched cottage opposite an ancient cemetery. The way out is to the east, where a shroud of mist covers the secret pass by which you entered The Land.

*west

Narrow road.

You are on a narrow east-west road with forest to the north and gorse scrub to the south.

*west

Road opposite cottage.

You are standing on a badly paved road with the cemetery to the north and the home of the grave-digger to the south. An inscription on the cemetery gates reads, "RESTING PLACE OF LOST SOULS".

*north

You are lost in a misty graveyard.

Deep amongst the weeds and shrubs lies a small, roughly-hewn gravestone. The swiftly written epitaph reads: "Here Lies Iz The Wiz. The RollerSkating Speed Champ Of 1986."

My life in MUD really began with my death, for the highest status in this multi-user adventure is immortality; the rank of Wiz. Upon achieving enough points, you let your insignificant mortal body rot to dust and claim your right to be named within the list of true Wizards and Witches. The game takes place in an area known as 'The Land', which corresponds to any normal text-only adventure game. Yet when you step within its enchanted bounds, you are playing alongside many other characters each being run by another human being in another part of the country. And when I left behind my life in MUD (a

career in itself), I never dreamed that one day I would be meeting one of its original creators to talk about his dark past and the game's bright future.

MUDevised...

The Multi-User Dungeon began when two students (namely Richard Bartle and Roy Trubshaw) were studying Computer Science BSc (Honours) at Essex University and started to explore the limitations of the main-frame version of ADVENT, one of the original adventure games. Both thought that this could be expanded and Roy decided that two major changes were sorely needed. He want-

ed firstly to improve the definition language and secondly to explore the possibility of making it multi-user. Well, the rewrite of the definition language was not really too brilliant, but by devising a game where it is 'You vs Them' (as opposed to 'You vs It') they had stumbled upon a uniquely enjoyable and thoroughly addictive pastime.

MUDawn...

MUD started as a small CB-type program, and quickly developed into a quasi-realm consisting of evil woods, deadly dwarvish mines and even a cottage upon the edge of the foul-smelling swamp. Unfortunately, what started as a hobby rapidly became a near full-time challenge and course work began to suffer. Yet soon people from the University were linking up via their internal modems and experiencing the magic of MUD. Because the Essex DEC system-10 was not available during the day, the program could only be run during the night. Slowly the students began to practise this weird nocturnal ritual; a facet of MUD that has been passed down to this very day. All the best playing is done at night (the later the better). After all, when Iz changed from Iz the Mage to Iz the Wizard, the clock read 3.20am!

MUDEbut...

So time went by and MUD was opened up to the awaiting world and its cult status grew and grew. Every night, callers from outside the University would ring up to participate in this special game. MUDspeke was created - a sort of easy shorthand to speed up typing and sending messages - and the ranks of Wizzes grew and grew. Then came the day when a former Wizard called Jeremy San (known to all as Jez, writer/programmer of *Starglider I and II*) introduced Richard to Simon Dally, who worked for Century Communications and wished to market MUD professionally. So in 1985, MUSE (Multi-User Entertainments) was born; the company that would bring MUD to the general public at last.

MUDiscovery...

In the new version, obviously entitled MUD II, the original setting was retained, while huge new areas of The Land were added, including more problems and mobiles (the semi-intelligent monsters that roam around the



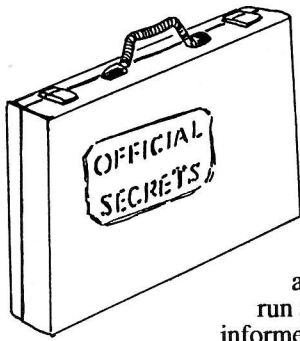
game). The number of locations was dramatically increased to about eight hundred, originally looking at a limit of about one thousand. Yet Richard feels that to add any more rooms would seriously affect the interaction that makes the game so special. After all, a game is not really very multi-user if you wander around never meeting anyone. The design of the game does throw people together though, for to gain points a player must drop items of treasure into the swamp, so this naturally becomes a very popular place. Now collecting treasure (or 'T' as it is referred to in MUDspeke) and dumping it into the swamp may sound a little boring - or at least a tedious way to advance through the game. Well, in any normal game it would be, but not when there are twenty other players each clammering after exactly the same items. The value of each item of T is based on the relative difficulty in obtaining it. So for the most part, to obtain such items as gold and jewels, you would have to brave some fearsome monster and fathom some ingenious puzzle.

MUDimension...

Apart from the added dimension of playing an adventure game with several other people, another attraction is that you can be whoever you like. As Richard pointed out, "In MUD, all players are created equal". It does not matter if, in reality, you are a four foot tall pacifist, for once you step into The Land, you can become the feared barbarian or even a crazy big-nosed nuisance called Iz who races around collecting T on rollerskates!

MUDiversifying...

MUD has also taken America by storm, for the US had nothing in the way of multi-user games until this came along. They are playing the original Essex game, but that has not stopped them from already securing fifty-four Wizard positions in their first year. "It took us four years to reach that number", the ArchWizard informed me with a wry smile. So why is it so popular across the Atlantic? Richard did not know, but said that there were noticeable differences between the British and American gamers. There are far more female players in comparison and the participants are on average



much older. Yet that may well be due to the fact that the prices are much higher. In Britain, charges are only about 50p an hour. In America they are \$6.00 an hour (about £3.50). It also runs all day every day and when one game has fif-

teen players, it is sealed and a new game is created to run alongside it. Richard informed me that it is not unusual for three games to be running simultaneously all through the week, though at peak times this can easily double.

MUDesign...

So what is the future of MUD? At the moment, the game has been transferred from its original DEC system-10 and now runs on a VAX8700. Both are extremely expensive mainframes, and not designed to run multi-user games at all. Richard has just finished work on a special piece of hardware that has been exclusively designed to

play MUD and nothing else. This is affectionately called the MUDBOX and is a fraction of the cost of a complete mainframe. The only things that have been included are the ports and hardware that the game uses directly, all other parts have been omitted. Hopefully the cost of this will be borne by PRESTEL, which is plans to accept MUD in the near future.

MUDispersal...

The project for MUD's creator will be at a tangent to his previous work, for at last he is starting to concentrate on writing new multi-user adventures, totally unconnected with The Land and its 'Wizardic' mayhem. Since Wizards can now create their own rooms and objects inside the framework of MUD, Richard can see no reason why they cannot create their own games and is hoping to commission his own players to write some new databases. Simon Dally - a speaker of four languages no less - is planning to convert versions of MUD to run in both French and Italian (which will no doubt give birth to a new generation of

A FEW WORDS OF MUDspeke

For the uninitiated, a conversation in The Land can leave you baffled. Here are some of the many words which players use to abbreviate, colour and clarify their speech.

ARCH-WIZ: Special Wizards and Witches with power over the others. They rarely flex their muscles, and are only present because if there weren't any, they *would* be needed! You can't work your way up to Arch-Wiz like you can to Wiz. They are appointed directly by MUSE as final overseers of The Land.

DEAD: Killed by some action of your own (eg. walking into the swamp while carrying a burning brand). You lose a few points, but not your whole persona.

DEAD DEAD: Killed by having your stamina drop to zero or less, usually in a fight. If you are dead dead, you lose all your points and your persona is eradicated from the files, meaning you have to start over from scratch.

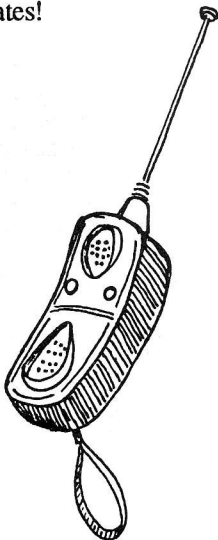
FOD: Acronym for Finger Of Death, the most powerful spell in MUD. Used mainly by Wizzes to dispose of people who are annoying them beyond endurance.

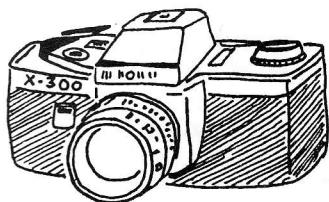
HEHEHE: Used in messages by players as a way of saying a number of things, from 'What I just said was meant to be taken in fun' to 'What you just said was amusing'. It is very easy to misunderstand someone when all the inflexion and tone is removed in the typed message.

THE LAND: MUD's scenario and the place where all adventure begins.

MOBILE: A computer-controlled creature which wanders around. Some are friendly, but most are very nasty. The Dragon and the Vampire are the worst!

WIZ: A generic term for the most powerful beings in the game.





Les Wizzes and Los Wizzios). Sadly though, MUD is no longer running at Essex, but soon enough this little game should be available through almost every network and possible in quite a few languages.

MUDestines...

But what about the future of multi-user games as a whole? Collectively there are about twelve commercial MUGs (meaning Multi-User Games; an acronym that one particular ArchWizard dislikes intensely) around at this time, including such names as *Shades*, *Gods* and the like. Of course none yet rates alongside the original, either in man-hours of development or playing time, but Richard is adamant that newer concepts could prove to be even more popular. "People are already working on a multi-user version of such games as *DungeonMaster*, which will include views of players and scenes as if you were walking inside them. When you created your character, you would choose from an identikit system of ears, noses eye colours etc. to come up with a unique picture." And will MUD go this way eventually? "MUD was written to be text-based, so it will always be text-based. If a game is to include graphics, then that has to be designed into the game from the outset." Richard went on to tell me that there is an existing game in the States called *Island Of Kesmai*, which combines both MUD and *Rogue* (a graphical adventure game that views the rooms in the dungeon from above). For this sort of game, participants will need to purchase a disk containing all the graphical information needed to play the game. Once the mainframe has been connected, it sends not text, but instructions that tell the micro what scene should be displayed; the data for this is stored in the mainframe, the graphics on the disk. In this way, by using a simple series of codes, whole wildernesses can be brought to life, complete with pictures of all participating characters. This certainly seems to be the shape of things to come.

MUDelving...

And as I said farewell to the master of the dungeon himself, he asked why I was the Rollerskating Speed Champ of 1986. Well, at that time, I could clear MUD of treasure in eighteen minutes from start to finish. Few people could beat that - and when they asked me how I did it? Well, I was on roller-skates of course...

WHERE CAN I FIND OUT MORE?

This interactive computerised adventure game is accessible to anyone with a home computer (almost any with an RS-232 port), a modem and a telephone.

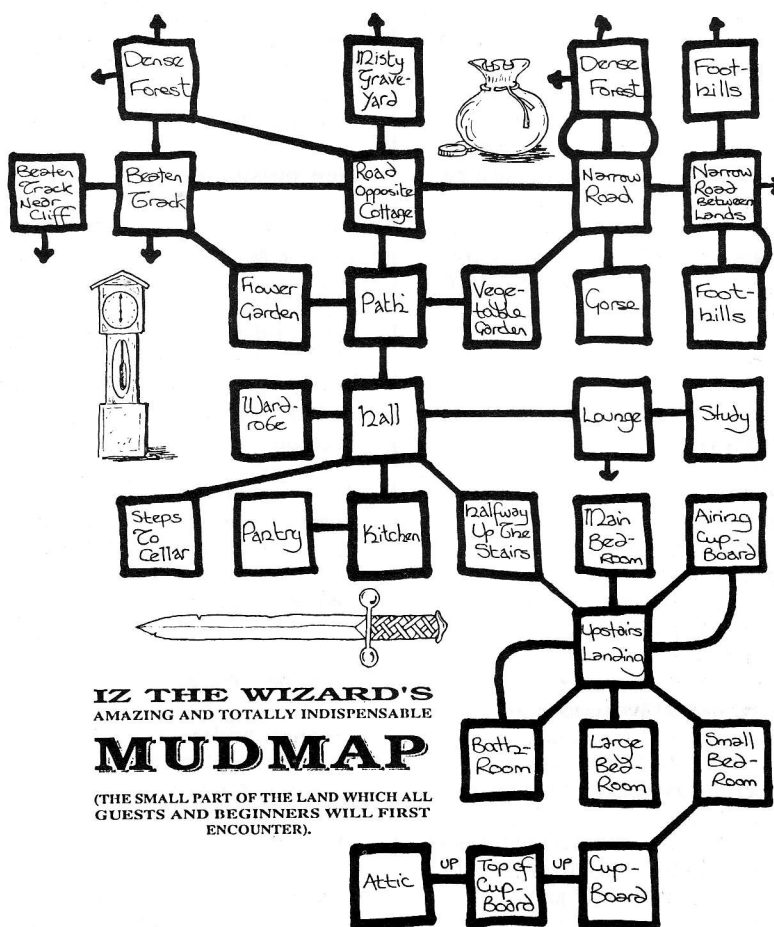
For more information, either write or call John on the helpline number or contact MUSE direct at: 6 Albemarle Way, London, EC1V 4JB. Richard has also given me some booklets and order forms - so if you are interested I can always send you some of these through the post for you to browse through.

If you already have a modem and cannot wait to get into MUD, then you can get a look at the game by signing on as a guest, which entitles you to twenty minutes free play. To do this: Set your communication software to Even Parity, 7 Bits, 1 Stop Bit and ring:

- 01 583 1275 for 1200/75 baud
- 01 583 1200 for 1200/1200 baud
- 01 583 3000 for 300/300 baud, or
- 01 583 8333 for 2400 bis.

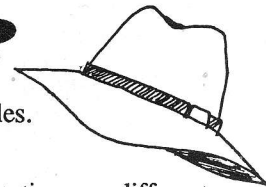
This will get you onto the BT GOLD network; hit <RETURN> a couple of times and then type CALL 41 to get through to the MUD computer. Once this is done, answer MUDGUEST to the question USERNAME? and PROSPECT to the PASSWORD? prompt.

Then the doors into The Land will swing open to you at last! And from this little Wizard, let me say you will never regret it.



...AGENT BRIDGE IS ON A MISSION BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN...REPLACE HIM QUICKLY...I DON'T CARE WHO IT IS, JUST GET THEM!...

WHAT'S IN A PUZZLE?



In the last issue, Tony Bridge looked at the development of adventure formats over the past years, with the advances in technology. Here, Keith Campbell, regular adventure writer for Computer & Video Games and Commodore User, looks at how the changes affect the very essence of adventure games - the puzzles...

In the beginning there was the word. The word conveyed the puzzle, and the puzzle was solved using the word, or rather, two of them - a verb and a noun.

First micro adventure

Before the advent of *Adventureland*, mainframes had been the province of adventure, and this severely limited the number of people who could get to play them. In those days, the 16K of memory available in the 'larger' standard home micros, was considered insufficient for a worthwhile adventure. The creation of the first home micro adventure, *Adventureland* by Scott Adams, was hailed as a minor miracle at the time. His programmer friends advised him it couldn't be done, since the parser and vocabulary had to be fitted into the 16K memory, as well as all the puzzle algorithms and text, not to mention the save game, and input/output routines. The amount of text in the descriptions was severely limited, and thus the puzzles, of necessity, were cryptic in nature. Since an adventure game is a series of interconnected puzzles, there must be some sort of story or theme to get them to hang together in a credible way. This was achieved by using a well known theme, likely to be familiar to the player, and forcing him to make use of his innate knowledge of the subject to reach logical deductions in search of solutions.

Scott Adams

For example, Scott Adams' themes ran from *Dracula* to *Ghost Town* - an eerie deserted western town. In *Dracula*, the player would already know that a vampire can only be killed with a wooden stake driven through its heart, that he sleeps in a coffin by day, that garlic is an effective deterrent, and that tied sheets are a classic way of escaping from a locked bedroom. But the player has to make the connections. By using knowledge already within the player, certain aspects of such puzzles could be taken for granted by the author, whilst a few logical clues could be provided, probably in the form of descriptions of various objects, to cover the others.



Subtle puzzles

As an actual illustration of such a puzzle, in *Ghost Town* there is a door bolt-

ed on the inside, which must be opened from the outside. Down at the stable, the player might have acquired a horseshoe. He may also be carrying a compass. The horseshoe was not described as a magnet in any text, and it was up to the player to make the connection with a horseshoe magnet, and to deduce that this could be used to slide the bolt. As an aid, the compass, if examined when the horseshoe was not carried, pointed north. However, if the horseshoe was in the player's inventory, it would point towards the horseshoe. But it had to be examined to discover this - there was simply no narrative text to tell you that the compass pointer had moved! This approach does not detract from the enjoyment of the game, but it does have the effect of concentrating the mind wonderfully on the puzzles. Today's narrative and descriptions are verbose, and thus lend themselves to more complex and subtle puzzles, without giving the game away, as too much text would have done in the example above.

New possibilities...

Before long, machines with what seemed huge amounts of memory became available at a very low price. The Spectrum, with a whole 48K, cost little more than £100 - one fifth of the price of the basic 16K TRS - 80 Model 1! Not only that, it had colour graphics! In the USA, meanwhile, disk-drive ownership was increasingly becoming the norm. New possibilities for adventure games now opened up. The adventure format could be made much more sophisticated, larger adventures could be written, graphics could be added. By storing text on a disk, and calling it into the machine quickly, as and when required by the program, really huge text adventures could be created.

Infocom arrives

At about this time the recently founded Infocom chose to stick to the text adventurer. They already had *Zork*, a trilogy converted from a single mainframe adventure, available on disk, and continued along that line, their potential market constantly expanding. *Zork* accepted multi-word sentences, and each part of the trilogy had verbose text descriptions and messages, accompanying many locations,

objects, and puzzles.

Hobbit pics

In the UK, the situation was different. Very few people indeed owned a drive, but many people owned a Spectrum (and would soon be owning a Commodore 64). Melbourne House, an Australian firm looking to the UK market, took the middle line. They produced a largish, fairly sophisticated adventure with pictures. The sophistication was in the parser, which could interpret (some!) complex sentences, including SAY TO commands for conversing with characters. Their first offering was probably the highest selling adventure game ever - *The Hobbit*. Now, to go with the word, the picture had arrived!

Illogical !

It was probably due more to its association with Tolkien's work, than to the excellence of the adventure, that gave *Hobbit* success. Its debut, on the relatively new Spectrum, meant it was being played, in the main, by people who had not played adventures before, and had no yardstick by which to judge it. Using a story familiar to many of its players (and the book was included in the package for those who were not) it relied again, on the innate knowledge of the player. But where it did not score very highly was on some of its illogical and unguessable puzzles (who would think of going back and waiting TWICE to avoid bulbous eyes...?), and its famous bugs. *Hobbit* bug-spotting became almost a hobby in its own right!

Setting new standards

As far as graphics were concerned, *Hobbit* set a standard format, with a picture for each location in the game. On tape systems, graphics became a subject of great controversy among adventure players, for two reasons. Most importantly, the data for the pictures had to be held in memory, taking up space which real adventure enthusiasts would have preferred to see put to use in enlarging the game, improving game-play by widening the range of recognised vocabulary, increasing the reliability of the parser, or augmenting the text. Secondly, the speed of response of the game was slowed down, whilst the picture (often mundane and mediocre) took its time to draw and fill on the screen. Who needed pictures anyway?

Disk-drives rule

Meanwhile, back in the States, Infocom were building up a catalogue of highly entertaining and popular titles. 48K of memory, coupled with the storage capacities of disk drives, meant

that they could get away from the innate knowledge/theme type of adventure, and write completely original stories. The puzzles, too, could be very original, highly complex, and involve much object manipulation, due to the authors' ability to write lengthy descriptions, and have all sorts of clues hidden away in unlikely places. No longer was innate knowledge required to solve them - there was enough space to set the scene in the text.

The classic Babel Fish

Who, for example, would have the slightest idea of how to get a Babel Fish out of a dispensing machine? This problem is a classic. Press the dispensing machine button, and a fish is ejected from the machine at such high speed, that it sails straight through a hole in the wall under a hook and disappears. The hole must be closed, but how? The answer is to hang the gown, that hopefully the player is wearing, on the hook. The next attempt sees the fish hitting the gown, but sliding down it into a drain in the floor directly under it. And so on.... Infocom then started to call their games' authors 'storytellers'. If you had the hardware and could afford £20 - £30 per game, there was nothing to touch Infocom. The word was king!

More memory

Hardware development continued apace, and before long even bigger machines were available at 'affordable' prices - the 16-bit Atari ST, Amiga, and IBM PC. An Infocom adventure could run much faster in these, since the whole thing could now be contained in memory, just as the original 16K tape games were.

Magnetic Scrolls

And then, along came Magnetic Scrolls! They used a very intelligent parser to drive an 'Infocom-type' text adventure held in memory, with some stunningly attractive graphics held on disk, designing their games essentially for 16-bit systems. Level 9 upgraded their system too, with some very sophisticated high level commands, with which you could move to a remote location by typing its name, and take the best route, stopping only if you came up against an obstacle that would have prevented you moving on with a series of orthodox commands. You could 'find' objects you had dropped whose whereabouts you had forgotten, and could also instruct a game (or NPC) character to carry out a whole series of instructions - and some actually did!

Parser problems

It is suggested by some cynics that the complexity of the sentences accepted by today's advanced parsers is largely irrelevant. There is some truth in that, but for complex problems a workaround is messy. Scott Adams

once told me that he didn't believe in complex parsers, since not only did everybody prefer to type just two words, everything could be achieved with two words. If you wanted to put a file in an oven to temper it, it isn't necessary to be able to enter PUT FILE IN OVEN as a single command, he maintained. "All you have to do is to arrange for the message WHERE to follow a PUT command, and watch for IN OVEN as the next input!" he explained. However, in his last game, *Fantastic Four*, he introduced his own complex parser, which at one point required the tortuous command THROW PEBBLE HARD UP SHAFT. Perhaps he was just trying to prove his original point!

Real stories...

Since the arrival of the 16-bit machines, then, the traditional text and text-with-graphics adventure has come a long way in terms of size and complexity. It can weave a real story around its puzzles (*Stationfall* for example), it can be poetic (*Trinity*), it can be hilarious (*Jinxter*), zany (*Bureaucracy*), or suspenseful (*Corruption*). Then the picture started taking over from the word. Two completely new approaches to graphics emerged, from Sierra and Mindscape.

Animated ego

In Sierra's system, as used in the *Quest* adventures (eg. *King's*, *Space*, *Police*) and superbly in *Leisure Suit Larry*, the picture is large, usually almost full screen. The player's ego is depicted as an animated character, whose movements are controlled by mouse or joystick. Other objects in the picture, too are animated, and music and sound effects are provided, offering a visually and aurally exciting game. Whilst moving from place to place is achieved graphically, other commands are typed in from the keyboard. Text messages appear in windows superimposed temporarily over the picture.

Limited

This system offers reasonable scope for puzzles, but the narrative is extremely limited, and in practice, puzzle-solving is largely guesswork, rather than logic. It can be difficult to move your 'ego' to precisely hit exits off the picture, and to position him correctly near objects to be able to take or examine them. The action is rather jerky, freezing whilst messages are on display, and the physical mode play is unergonomic, requiring constant changeover from joystick to keyboard.

Icon-driven systems

Mindscape's system, as used in *Shadowgate*, *Uninvited*, and *Déjà Vu*, is quite different, being driven by a combination of word icons and picture objects. Text messages are given, but

the player's input is purely by mouse, using either the icons, or rather cleverly, taking or dropping an object by 'dragging' it out of the picture into an inventory window and vice versa. Shorthand 'clicks' are available to speed up play.

Return of the two-word parser

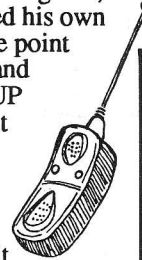
Boiled down into conventional terms, the input is essentially of the two-word variety. The word icons are the verbs, and the noun icons are objects shown in the picture. The most complex action is OPERATE, where, for example, you might OPERATE (verb icon) KEY (inventory object) ON (implied) DOOR (picture object). So we are virtually back full circle, with a good old-fashioned two-word parser! Not quite, for the input does not have to be parsed - it is effectively input in separate words, and all of them are valid! The verb range is of necessity small, to fit on the display, and so the puzzles are quite shallow. OPERATE is a catch-all command to use any object for its intended purpose, leaving little scope for imaginative thinking. In a text adventure, much of the puzzling is over exactly how to use an object!

Magnificent...

There is no way that I can see, for example, how this system could be used to implement a magnificent puzzle like the breaking of the underground wall in *Lurking Horror*. Here, an old underground passage leads to a dead-end at a newly constructed wall. Manipulation of the brickwork with the correct tool, releases only one loose brick, to reveal a reinforcing rod. Now it becomes necessary to find a route into the passage with a sufficiently large access to take a couple of large objects. Careful mapping will reveal that the other side of the wall is the pit at the bottom of the lift shaft. Reaching the solution requires much examining and experimenting, and involves tying a chain round the reinforcing rod and placing the other end over a hook on the underside of the lift. Of course, the lift doors have to be forced first and the pit entered via the lift shaft. Finally, the lift is summoned from the top floor... Try doing that in graphics!

In conclusion

A text-based system, then, is essential for an adventure with any depth. There are bound to be continual improvements and innovations on the graphics side of adventures, for these help sell the games in sufficient quantities. But in the final analysis, graphics can only be regarded as a frill to the text story, which, spiced with delicious puzzles, will give the thinking player so much enjoyment and satisfaction.



...WHO LEFT THIS BOX PROPPING OPEN MY OFFICE DOOR?...LEGEND OF THE SWORD?...WHO ON EARTH WROTE THIS?... TREVILLIAN!!!!...

After receiving my sealed orders from The Boss Upstairs, I promptly ate them and rushed for the very next train. Leaving behind the bright lights of London, I travelled down to Eastbourne to meet the faces behind the mask of Silicon Software, the writers and programmers of 'Legend Of The Sword'. And down on the south coast, things were definitely afoot...

THE LEGEND OF SILICON SOFTWARE



Stations are curious places for meeting people, I thought as I passed through the crowd at the ticket barrier, especially when you have no idea what the person you are supposed to be meeting looks like. Still, I should be hard to miss. I mean, who else walks around in dark glasses carrying a violin case these days? Scanning the gawping faces, I suddenly caught sight of someone carrying a *Legend* box and, dismissing coincidence, I was soon introduced to Karl Buckingham, the founder of the company. As we walked to the meeting, he explained that funds for offices are yet to be raised, so they were currently working from home.

Lurked

Within minutes we arrived at an ordinary front door in an ordinary street, but inside lurked the other two members of the team, and a formidable array of computer hardware.

Redesigned

Silicon Software began life creating *Legend* for the 8-bit marketplace, mainly for Amstrad and similar machines. The game was basically the same, easily recognisable from the final version that we see today in terms of layout, but with the notable exception of the mapping scroll. Work was coming along when Karl took the company over, approached Rainbird with the concept and was told that they would only consider it if it was rewritten for the growing 16-bit range of computers. So off they went and when this was done, the game was redesigned in the new format.

The Team

The team who have worked on *Legend* has been mainly the same throughout; Karl, the game's designer and writer; Colin Mongardi, a freelance programmer; and Eugene Messina, who doubles as both programmer and graphics designer. It was he who added the impressive mapping system to the final version; seen as a unique feature and major addition to the game. Each comes from a variety of backgrounds. Karl has always wanted to

be a writer, but found that in order to make a living he was forced to train as a pharmacy technician. When he joined the SS crew, he was putting together a fantasy/mythology story, yet this was soon shelved when the project took off. Colin once worked at a recording studio, but he decided to turn his talents to programming and now has nine years of experience under his belt. He has designed business applications in the past and also put together a sampling program. Eugene programmed *Destructo*, an arcade game for the Mastertronic label, before joining Silicon. And the strange thing is that none of them had ever been adventure game fans before writing *Legend*.

Experience

Colin had only ever played *Inca Curse*, Eugene had previously played one Scott Adams game on his TRS-80 and Karl's jaunt into the adventure world is limited to borrowing a friend's copy of *The Hobbit* for the evening many moons ago. He admitted, "I was completely put off. After spending half an hour trying to get the parser to accept one particular statement, I wasn't really interested in the rest of the game." Yet Eugene and himself have had a lot of role-playing experience, in such classic games as *Dungeons and Dragons*, *Runequest*, *Traveller* and *Call Of Cthulu*. Karl is also a self-confessed book lover, rating his favourites as Tolkien and Terry Brooks.

Disillusioned

All were more than a little disillusioned with text adventures, hence their decision to depart from the accepted adventure format. They were all impressed with the uniqueness of games such as *Lords Of Midnight* with its innovative landscaping features, and more recently, the excellent *Dungeon Master*. Games such as these, which broke all the age-old traditions, inspired them to try a new approach to the graphical role-playing game.

Enormity

Legend Of The Sword took about four man-years to complete, yet this is

understandable when compared with the sheer enormity of the game. Compressed onto the disks is 800k of text, 300k of graphics and about 180k of general commands and parser. An impressive total, but Silicon promise far better things with their planned sequel to *Legend*, and in the future, a whole range of other projects and packages.

The Sequel?

After the success of the original, Rainbird asked Karl to bring out the inevitable follow-up game using the unchanged *Legend* system, but he would not hear of it. Karl told me, "We could easily have finished another game for Christmas, but without any real changes, it would have been just different backgrounds and story." Instead they are improving every aspect of the program, from enhancing the already extensive parser to increasing the amount of character interaction throughout. The characters can now be named by the player and given a series of directions to follow, as well as allowing you the option to play any one of the eventual six that you meet on your travels. This means that if you get killed somewhere along the way, you can transfer to another persona and continue your quest.





Complex

The other main difference with the sequel is that it will be designed around a semi real-time system which will allow a much greater range of problems, especially those dependant upon the player's reactions. With the combination of an actual clock (probably displayed on the screen) and the computer's own internal clicks, every action will take a specified time to perform, from simple commands such as picking up a sword or drawing a weapon, to complex ones like travelling back across the island to the awaiting ship. A fully implemented weather system will add a further realism to the landscape, altering certain actions in the process. Say, for example, you wish to retrieve a mysterious-looking nest from the branches of a tree; climbing would work, but not when it had been raining for the whole day. The trunk, you would be told, is far too slippery!

Interaction

A new (and therefore top secret) character interaction parser is being introduced, to complement a redesign of the action/locational graphics. Some of the pictures are reported to expand to half screen size and all use the full sixteen colours available on the larger machines. Nothing it seems is being left alone, for even the map will scroll in each direction, showing at will the whole currently explored area.

Suzar's return?

And as an exclusive to CONFIDENTIAL, Silicon did allow me to mention a few whispered words of the next storyline. The game is entitled *The Final Battle* and will be the last part of the *Legend* saga (at least for the foreseeable future), starting where the other game ended, with the gaining of the sacred sword and shield. Once

these artifacts have been won, they can be used to thwart the evil Suzar and crush his marauding bands of mutated humanoids. It begins in a prison cell and the first part of the adventure deals with the escape (Is that the breath of air you can feel coming from that grill up there?) and the meeting with the rest of your little party. Once this is done, you begin the long trek to Suzar's castle in an attempt to slay him.

Multi-user

It seems also that the guys from SS are working on a network system which will allow each of the five players to be controlled separately by five different players on five different computers! This should add a full multi-user feel to the whole quest if they can solve the obvious problems of linking the hardware together. And all this will be available by mid-Summer 1989.

Launching

Yet there are further-reaching plans yet to be exposed. After acquiring their offices (a necessity which I am sure they will be hard pressed to avoid judging by the increasing lack of space), they are launching four projects, each using the revised *Legend* system. Their third game will leave behind the land of Anar and break into fresh grounds, namely the supernatural. This will take place in modern days, starting with a plane crash. Exciting stuff until you learn that it will end up at the gateway to Hell itself! This is being co-written with Darren Coldwell (of whom I must confess to knowing very little) and is tentatively known as *The Shadow Spirits*. The fourth game? Well, this is a little less straightforward as it is being pioneered by Eugene, who will give few coherent words away on this subject (even under torture). He told me only this (and I am obliged to quote): "The game is something special. A game for Godheads. *Cave canem!* It is written by two men of great knowledge; two brothers who have no names as of yet, but they have done a lot of travelling and have a lot of knowledge."

Stepping stone

Hmmm... Well, moving swiftly on, I asked the trio to stop quoting Latin and try to spread their sights even further ahead into the mists of their future. Now things got totally hazy. Karl told me that the other couple of planned adventures were merely sketchy ideas based around the concept that they should try less-worn genre than the usual fantasy story. They are thinking of taking on two writers to produce a Science Fiction scenario and one set upon the streets of New York in a Detective set-

ting. From there, they see another update of the parser to keep up with the times and perhaps a new landscaping feature. This should certainly keep them all busy for a few years. "*Legend* was a stepping stone," remarked Eugene in a moment of sanity, "from here we want to break new frontiers...and discover new clichés". With their next game they will certainly have taken another step forward. Judging by their determination and ability it will be one of many.

A QUICK CLUE (for those of you

stuck in LOTS of trouble)...

To find the password to pass through the tunnels and cross to the other part of the land, look down at the steps and then up...But I don't think you should wait for nightfall for those bats to go away...

DON'T FORGET!

We will be stocking back editions of all copies of CONFIDENTIAL, so if you were not lucky enough to get your grubby little hands on the first copy, let us know and we will speed one to you for a fee of only £2.00. And for those who do not know, Issue One contained:

A Fishy Business - An account of the goings on surrounding Magnetic Scrolls' Fish.

Let There Be Life - Steve Cooke's look at NPCs in adventure games.

Playing Live - at the Labyrinth.

Personnel File - on Michael Bywater, writer for Punch magazine and co-writer on Bureau-cracy and Jinxter.

Play By Mail-Order - Mike Gerard's look at the smaller mail-order adventure businesses.

SO ASK FOR YOUR COPY RIGHT AWAY!

...WHAT?...PETER WRIGHT HAS DROPPED THE SPYCATCHER INTERVIEW!!!...WELL FIND ANOTHER MAJOR NAME FROM ESPIONAGE...

When faced with a disaster such as the losing of a leading interviewee and with copy dates pressing, we sent Agent Kane out to find someone else. Would she bring back an exposé on MI5 or an exclusive chat with the leader of the KGB? Well, she said she had found a surprise alternative, but no one expected Level 9's 'Gnome Secretary' herself...

THE PERSONNEL FILE PRESENTS: INGRID BOTTOMLOW

Which school did you go to?

The Institute of Gnome Economics.

Did you have any nicknames at school?

I was so busy that Mistress Kneehigh used to call me a little bee.

How did you get on with the other gnomes? Did you have many friends?

Oh yes. We used to play lovely games of hide-and-seek. I was ever so good at it. Do you know, one time gno gnome found me for five days!

Does being a gnome give you a little advantage in life? Or does being a gnome have its shortcomings?

Gno, it's a BIG advantage. There's no race like gnomes, as long as you avoid getting trodden on.

What do you consider to be your best features?

My talent for ideas and my get-up-and-go.

If you could change anything about yourself what would it be?

Gnothing. I don't believe in gnome improvements.

Do you think that appearance is important? Or do you believe that the inner-self is what really matters?

Oh, it's the inner-self that counts. It's like Mrs Tackhammer says about Seamus; he may be small and weedy to look at but he's ever so big inside.

Did you have a good relationship with your parents when you were younger? How do you get on with them now?

Oh, wonderfully. They were always sending me away to school or on holidays.

What do your parents do for a living?

As little as possible.

What's the worst thing that has ever happened to you?

Once I had a whole day when gnothing happened at all. It was awful.

Are you frightened of growing old?

Gno. I shan't start slowing down for a century or two.

Do you believe in life after death?

Yes - we'll all end up in that Great Garden at 34 Acacia Avenue.

Are you interested in politics?

Gno. I want to do something useful with my life.

If you could be an animal, what would you choose to be?

I wouldn't mind being a human for a few minutes.



What is your favourite shop - Littlewoods?

I prefer British Gnome Stores.

We don't know much about your feelings towards the opposite sex. Have you ever been in love, and are you interested in getting married and settling down?

Romantic gnowsense. Marriage is a business. Great Aunt Halfyard says I should look for a sleeping partner with substantial assets.

If you had difficulty meeting a gnice man would you consider placing a lonely hearts ad?

Gno, but I might advertise under gnome affairs.

If you could be invisible for a day, where would you go and why?

What a funny idea! I'd much rather people could see me.

Do you have any recurring dreams?

Yes, I had this one where this twit keeps asking me silly questions!

BOTTOMLOW

First Name: Flora (Ingrid)

Date of Birth: 9 Sleptunder

Star Sign: Virago

Place of Birth: Gnettlefield Farm

Height: Just right

Colour of Hair: Walnut

Colour of Eyes: Red

Educated: Ever-so-well

Occupation: Rebuilding Gnettlesfield Farm

Dislikes: Stick-in-the-muds

Favourite food: Doughgnuts

Pastimes: Helping others

If you would like the 'low-down' on any celebrity in the games world, then write to PERSONNEL FILE, let us know and we will send our 'Spy on the Spot' Agent Kane and she will track them down and get all their details!

...HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO SAY THIS?...I DONT WANT REVIEWS...GET AGENT WINSTANLEY TO THROW SOMETHING TOGETHER...

POOL OF RADIANCE

At last the long awaited conversion of Advanced Dungeons And Dragons has hit your computer screen (if you have a C64 and disk-drive that is). Never mind scrabbling to find enough interested players and someone willing and experienced enough to act as Dungeon Master...now you can play whenever you wish. Pool of Radiance is the first of the 'Forgotten Realms' saga and places you in the fabled city of Phlan which, as your Adventurer's Journal explains, has suffered a chequered history. Its present state is of a city at war with the human forces huddled behind a strong stockade while the ruins beyond are inhabited by petty bands of evil orcs, goblins, humans and other, more sinister, monsters.



The game

Your quest is to discover the identity of the evil force that is leading the monsters and rid Phlan of its scourge. To this end you control a party of six adventurers each having their own skills, abilities and alignments. The game statistics are closely modelled upon AD&D standards with monsters, spells and items being taken from the AD&D books, the Monster Manuals, Dungeon Master's Guide and Player's Handbook.

Creating the characters

Each character can be a dwarf, elf, gnome, half-elf, halfling or human and can choose a specialist character class or a combination of classes. The classes are magic-user, cleric, fighter and thief. As the characters progress through the game, they gain experience which allows promotion to higher levels. Higher levels give the character more hit points and thus more potential for survival. Characters have varying abilities which affect the character's effectiveness during the game. High abilities increase the amount of experience a character gains during play and also the skill of the character in its chosen class. Thus the fighters benefit from strength, while thieves require good dexterity. These abilities are randomly generated by the computer during character creation.

As a final touch, you can also choose each character's alignment from a range of nine types varying from lawful good to chaotic evil. A character's alignment can affect how he is viewed by non-player characters (or NPCs). Once your characters have been generated (and a nice touch is that you can adjust attribute levels yourself after the random sequence), their appearance can be set to a variety of different outfits and anatomical details.

The first mission

Then it's off to Phlan to begin your quest. Initially, you are treated to a whistle-stop tour of part of the city, with your guide pointing out buildings of interest, then it's time to go to the city hall for a mission. At the start this will be something like the clearance of an unsettled area of its roguish inhabitants. You will meet kobolds, orcs, goblins, trolls and ogres on this mission, the latter two beasts causing formidable problems to your party if met in a group. Most of the smaller opponents can be defeated without too much trouble, especially if your magic-user casts a sleep spell at the horde. Watch out though for the larger creatures as they are only partly affected (if at all) and can easily overpower your group.

The first fight

Combat is entered in a variety of ways. As you explore the area you are treated to a three-dimensional display of your surroundings complete with doors, archways and stone or wooden walls. Some areas and buildings are preset to contain monsters going about their daily existence. You'll meet rookie goblin soldiers under instruction, kobolds in their mess, arguing orcs and more. Some individuals also live in the ruins and they may offer you further missions or information. Also in the ruins are bands of creatures wandering about. These are encountered randomly (usually just as you've finished another battle and before you've had time to rest and replenish your spells and hit points!) Depending upon who spots



who first you may get the chance to run away, but this option is often fore-stalled if the opponents seriously outnumber or outmatch you. When combat is joined, the screen display changes to a full screen, pseudo-overhead 3-D view of your surroundings, your party and your foes. You can choose to control the actions of your party members directly or let the computer do the job for you. This is available independently for each party member in each round of combat. Resolving combat is handled by the computer and depends upon the relative strengths of the current combatants. Each character has a number called 'thaco' which is a measure of characters' chance of hitting the target. This is modified by the armour class of the opponent so that a well-armoured foe is less likely to be hit than an unprotected one.

Oh no! I'm hit!

If a hit is made, the recipient of the blow loses hit points. A character whose hit points are reduced to zero is unconscious and out of the battle. He may also be dying in which case a member of your party must spend a combat round bandaging him to preserve his life. If a character does die he may possibly be resurrected by an independent cleric, unless he has been totally disintegrated by dragon flame or a disintegrate spell.

And if you win?

If all your party die or become unconscious you have lost and will have to start again from a saved position, but if there are any survivors you will probably find that the monsters have left armour, weapons, coins or even special items behind. Money can be shared out equally or pooled and taken by one or more characters. Other items can be picked up by any character who has some spare carrying capacity. Not all classes can use each item, clerics and magic users in particular being restricted in their choice of armour and weapons.

Making camp in the great outdoors

Once the booty has been divided up it is time to make camp. This can be done anywhere, but some places are

more dangerous than others, so prudence is required. While camping in an unsafe place, probably the best tactic is to save and cure urgent wounds only, so do not sleep unless you have already saved your position! Later, when a safer spot is found you should replenish hit points fully and only then regenerate magical abilities.

Meanwhile, back in the city...

When you have accumulated sufficient experience points and money, it is time to head for the training hall where you can get your characters promoted. Each class has a different room for training and in the centre of the hall is a duelling area where you can train in relative safety. You are offered opponents of your own ability and arms with whom you may duel (not normally to the death) thereby gaining experience points if you succeed. The civilised areas of Phlan also boast a variety of shops, taverns, inns and temples. Shops sell all kinds of items and also take second-hand goods. This is the quickest (non-cheating) method of building up money, as much of the arms and armour dropped by vanquished foes may be sold for a good profit. However some of the items found in the unsettled areas are of shoddy workmanship and are worth nothing - very frustrating when you've lugged them back through territories crawling with kobolds to fill your purse. For a price, temples will heal you, but initially you're better off resting-up or using your own cleric spells as these are normally free. You can also have various gems and other treasures appraised at both temples and shops, but since these weigh far less than their worth in coins, it's better to hang on to them as long as possible. Note: the more you carry, the slower you are in combat.

Down at the tavern

Taverns are the source of much gossip and also offer opportunities to gamble. But a great drawback for novice parties is the volatile nature of such spots where bar-room brawls break out frequently, usually with you right in the middle of swarming fighters and thieves. Camping out in the city is likely to bring the City Watch down around your ears, so inns are the best choice there, even if they are rather costly. You can stay as long as you like once you have paid the fee, with no nasty monsters to ruin your beauty sleep.



Onto larger things

All of this is merely scratching the surface of what is a game of enormous depth and scope. Further missions, each of which brings a reward when completed, include the rescue of a kidnapped heir, elimination of the source of river poisoning, discovery and elim-

HINTS AND TIPS ON GETTING STARTED

1. Generate a dummy party with their attributes adjusted to maximum for initial exploration of the unsettled areas. This will give you the chance to become accustomed to combat options with a fair chance of surviving mistakes. Once you know what you are doing, begin again with a randomly generated party and a fresh game.
2. Money may be accumulated early by generating characters, taking their money and giving it to the main party, then having no further use for the dummy characters, they can be removed from your character disc (Cheat!).
3. Make sure each member of your party has both melee (eg. sword) and ranged (eg. bow and arrow) weapons as the party's marching order can be seriously undermined if the monsters surround you.
4. Save before entering taverns as you are likely to become involved in brawls...fatal in the early stages.
5. When collecting booty after battle, armour and longbows generally have high trade values. Also look out for occasional special items which can be worth thousands of gold pieces.

ination of a pirate base and the rescue of other Adventurers from a graveyard, to name but a few.

Personally I can't wait to play the game for real with no deadline to meet!

WHAT'S IN THE BOX (or Wot No Tea Towel?)

Like many good games these days, the *Pool of Radiance* box contains lots of detail to help you play the game to maximum enjoyment including:

Four double-sided disks (You'll also need at least one blank disk for saving your characters and preferably four more, together with a commercial copying program, to back them up from the original disks).

A machine-specific quick start card, giving loading information and general outline of recommended early play.

A translation wheel which forms part of the game's protection system and is also used during the game to translate Elvish (Espruar) and Dwarvish (Dethek) into English. It's also delightfully tactile for fiddling with while waiting for the disk access during play.

A thirty-two page playing guide with all the details needed to generate characters, cast spells, enter and resolve combat and generally conduct your party to the best effect.

The Adventurer's Journal containing;

the full history of the city of Phlan; a list of some of the monsters you will encounter and information on their strengths and fighting methods; the text of proclamations posted to the door of the city hall detailing missions for which the council is recruiting; journal entries providing clues, maps, etc. to help adventurers on their way; tavern tales of snippets of information and rumours overheard in the taverns; and appendices giving quick reference lists of arms and armour, money conversion tables, spells by level and a glossary of terms for the novice role-player.

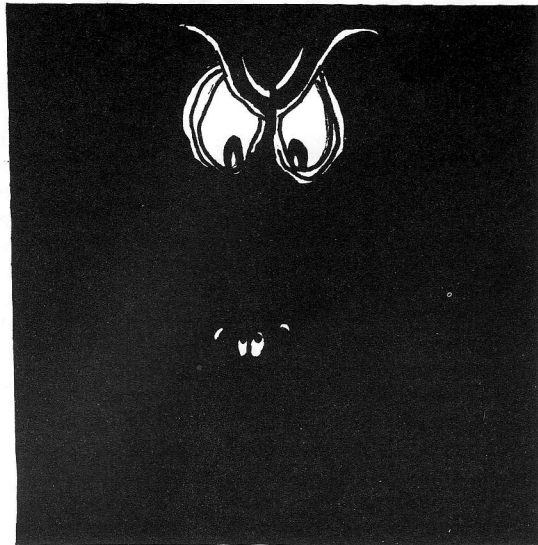


...OUR AGENTS KEEP ON GETTING EATEN BY MONSTERS...IT'S A JUNGLE OUT THERE!...GET SOMETHING TO HELP THEM FAST...DO IT NOW!...

The Bestiary File

THE GRUE (*Gruesomius Horribilis*)

Zork I, II, III, Wishbringer, etc...



SPECIES: Unknown
ORIGIN: Possibly hatched from an egg
DIMENSIONS: No description known (estimated at least 9' by Professors at GUE University from jaw marks on bones and a few footprints)
DIET: Strict carnivore (will only eat lone Adventurers)
HABITAT: Known throughout the Empire
POPULATION DENSITY: Unguessable
GROUPING NUMBER: Two to five in any one lair
LAIR: Underground in complete darkness
LIFESPAN: Unrecorded
LOCOMOTION: Two five-toed legs (they are known to lurk for their prey)
REPRODUCTION: Unknown (they do it with the lights out)
MATING SEASON: Every other Saturday
SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR: Very much a family creature
COMMUNICATION: Whispers
INTELLIGENCE: Primal

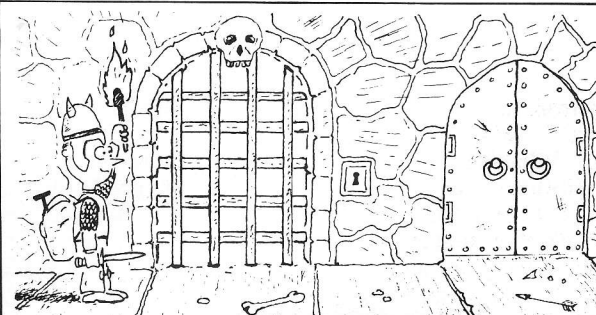
These fearsome creatures have been recorded throughout the history of the Great Underground Empire. They were first discovered preying on lone workmen who wandered a bit too far from their worksites, way back when the first tunnels were being dug. They have never been seen, as they live in total blackness and shy away from light in all its forms. The only way anyone ever found out about these terrible monsters was from the scattered remains that they leave after meals - they are very messy eaters. Many Adventurers were sent to combat these menaces, but none ever succeeded in doing much about them. In fact, with the recent decline in the number of brave fellows willing to track them down, the grue population (which no one has ever been courageous enough to chance a guess at in fear of the public hysteria this would cause) have even taken to eating their victims' bones!

So with no real solution to the grue threat (though they are reported to be heavy sleepers), measures have been taken to combat this nocturnal menace, beginning with the world-famous 'Anti-Grue Cream'. This is made from all manner of evil-smelling materials and is issued with a set of neat plastic noseplugs to make sure the wearer is not instantly fumigated when he opens the tube. Goggles are also recommended as the stench can also rot away the eyes. The manufacturers suggest that the cream should be smeared all over the body prior to adventuring in the dark, although try not to let it make contact with any fabrics as corrosion usually results. If in doubt, stay at home and, in case of emergency, remember to keep the fridge door open!

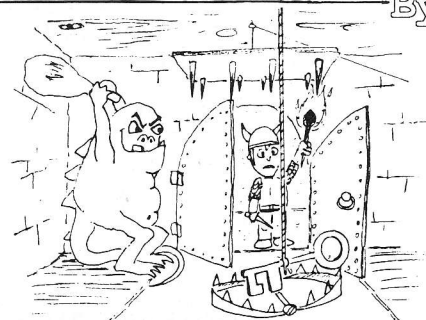
BIXBY...

Living inside every Adventure game is a little fellow whose task is to undertake all the commands that your warped mind dreams up. For you, solving each game involves nothing more than a few clackety keystrokes, but to this poor bod, it's murder! Have you ever wondered just what you expect him to do? Have you ever considered just how stupid these commands actually are? How embarrassing? No? Well, I think you should, starting right now! Geez, you sure are mean to the little guy, you know... Take for example that most common of Adventure settings: The Dungeon...

By Rob.



I am standing in a shadowy corridor. There is a closed portcullis here and an iron door which is shut. There is a golden keyhole here. What shall I do now?> open portcullis
 The portcullis is locked. What shall I do now?> open iron door



Opening the iron door reveals a big stone room. There are some traps here. There is a metal key here. What shall I do now?> take key
 Are you kidding? There are lots of traps!...>just take the key, smart ass
 Okey, you're the boss. <Gulp!>



BLAM!
 SWATH
 SMASH
 CRUNCH
 THWACK!
 tinkle
 BONK
 CRACK!
 BOOM!



What shall I do now?> unlock portcullis with metal key
 The metal key does not fit in the golden keyhole!
 So what do you suggest next, dearie?

...DIDN'T WE SEND AGENT WALKLAND OFF TO DO SOMETHING FOR US?...WELL? ANY WORD?...WHAT DO YOU MEAN 'ONLY A POSTCARD'?...

This issue's 'ON THE CASE' assignment took Nick Walkland to Blackpool where he opened the bag on

KJC GAMES



Questions rose from the void: "What was I doing here?" "Why was I wearing a tee-shirt?" What is the nature of celestial bodies influencing our lifestyle?" Unfortunately, CONFIDENTIAL doesn't offer me the space to ponder such complexities but to meet the world's largest postal gaming company - KJC Games.

"Where is 'Cleveleys nr. Blackpool' then?" I wondered as I got off the train. I didn't fancy scouring Blackpool after what was a pretty hideous train journey. Sheepishly, I rummaged in my pocket for a crumpled piece of paper and phoned up KJC - How do I get there and all that. Fortunately, the guy on the other end replied "Stay there!"

So instead of grabbing a bus, tram or taxi, I managed to cadge a lift off one of the KJC Mob themselves. Then it appeared - a monster-sized Capri tearing around the corner, screeching to a

halt to bundle me in.

An ominous start? I tried to talk, but the sheer speed of travelling the few miles from Blackpool to Cleveleys was inspired. Ensuring in the wake, a clear street free of grannies and little white poodles.

The fair-haired guy giving me the lift was Nigel Mitchell from Woking, a self-confessed 'troubleshooter' for the company. It is he who deals with player problems, edits the KJC magazine, and dabbles in programming the myriad of computers. He told me that I had visited at the wrong time - at the end of the postal strike when the Manchester sorting office was still proudly holding two fingers erect. This visit looked more ominous than before, and that was pretty ominous.

Here I was, visiting a place of eleven people, of whom nine were laid off! These are mainly locals, except for

Nigel and Dave Bolton, from Manchester, who had popped in at KJC despite not being paid. The strike hit KJC very hard, explained Nigel, with no revenue earned from advertising, games or anything. They were forced to lay off staff for the duration of the strike. Fortunately the company weren't idle during this time - catching up on bits 'n' bobs of their games as well as updating and changing the computer programs.

We came to an abrupt halt off the major seafront road in the Cleveleys area, where above a games shop run by KJC's founder, Kevin Cropper and his brother, I was led. The room was populated by computers and two 'pleasantly plump' (for want of a better word) guys; tanned Kevin Cropper and a smaller Dave Bolton. The computers were mainly cheap IBM compatibles (Amstrad) and were printed on the three Epson EX800 or the two FX80. As there are over 15, 000 on the mail-

ing list, the printers are in almost constant use, although a deathly silence was on them at the moment. Every two hours, the equivalent of a small novel is produced, going through 100,000 sheets and 50+ boxes of paper a month. The postal bill alone comes to a staggering £34,000 a year...amazing!

The main game run by KJC is *It's A Crime* with over 10,000 players. Or more exactly, 25 games with 500 in each. It is a game about gang warfare from the 'Wanderers' genre. The aim is to become the city's *numero uno* gang by taking control of as many of the ten thousand blocks as possible, become the most notorious and so on. The game was leased from the American postal game company, Adventures By Mail (or ABM), with the necessary software to allow it to be run. Free starter pack for the first few turns, it's easy and different.

Troll's Bottom comes as a free starter pack too and is a humorous and really easy game. The idea is to kill all the other trolls to become the only one on the island. All you have is your pet vulture and a sundry few other items. You have to plot your rise according to food and weapons, taking into account the weather.

KJC also run several other games. *Capitol* from ABM with five games of 96 players; *Earthwood* with seventy-five games of 25 players each, with *Seakings* being a similar game; *Dawn of Ancients*, to pit Romans against Gauls (or vice versa) and recreate history as one of 12 players in one of the thirty-six games; *State of War*, based upon the US Civil War in the twentieth century; try to expand and take over presidency.

They are working on two new games at the moment, a 100-player military strategy - *Warlords* and *Quest*, a 500-player fantasy game. These should be up and running soon.

With the massive array of computers, someone must know something. They are usually provided with data actually intact from the American companies which they can't always change. Sometimes in Pascal, but more often than not, in Basic.

KJC started as a company five years ago after the hobby Kevin started back in 1981 looked commercially viable and four staff were taken on. Nowadays, KJC are the largest PBM company in the world, overtaking giants like ABM themselves. Ever expanding into new ground, they had to cut away the perennial favourite, *Crasimoff's World* due to time pressures. This incidentally was given to an ex-KJC employee who runs it 'extremely well now'.

Their aim for the future is to corner one half of the postal gaming market. To design more of their own games and gain more licences for others. They want more complex games utilizing computer power and rudimentary Artificial Intelligence, giving games like *IAC* more depth. Also, to make the print-outs more pretty with extra maps and graphics.

Another aim is to delve deeper into the European market. At the moment, 10% of the players are from Europe (Scandinavia mostly) with many from Holland, Belgium and Germany. They receive their turns in English and pay the same rates as in Britain.

The company also have regular pub-meets to get to know their punters, as an informal get together with over 100 people attending. The last one was in November, and once in Blackpool they hired a marquee and fifteen people were crammed in each office. And I can tell you, they're tiny.

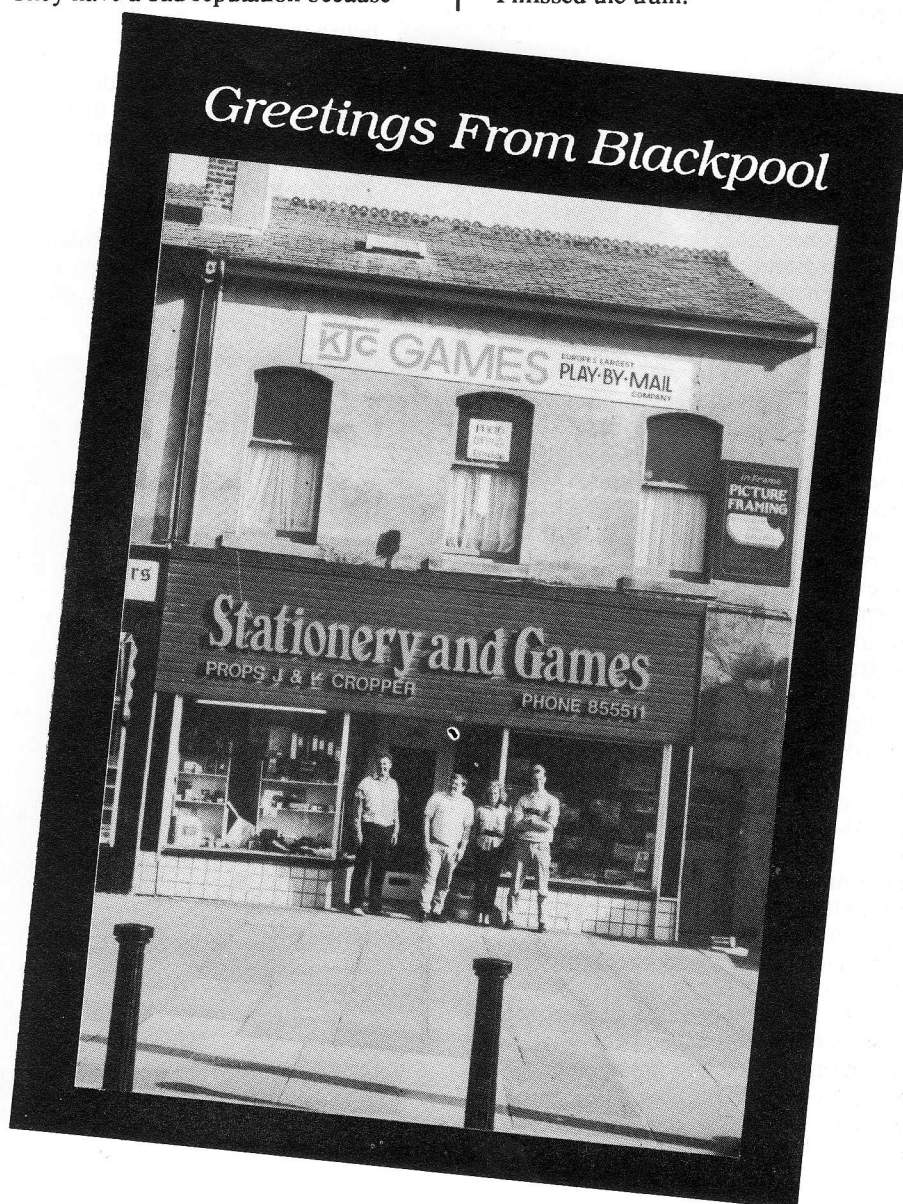
Is running a postal game company a good thing? Well, KJC are the only one expanding in this game genre. They have a bad reputation because

they are one of the few professional companies. They are dedicated to their task and have received a lot of grouching from other companies. KJC don't mind; in their view anyone could have done it, but they sat up and bit the cherry when the opportunity arose. They see their rivals as jaded and slothful.

Advertising has been very successful, and the biggest push so far was the free starter pack on the front cover of issue one of GM. This was held up by the strike, but they are hoping for a deluge of 10,000 and 30,000 new players. At this point, only 200 had taken up the offer, with thousands expected.

Unfortunately, my time in the KJC development office was drawing to a close with the sudden sweep of time to catch the next train before the Lancashire rush hour. So I had to leave. It was a shame it couldn't have been an interview thing, but there you go. Good old Nigel Mitchell offered me a lift back so I took a few snapshots and strapped myself in for take off for my last dash through Blackpool.

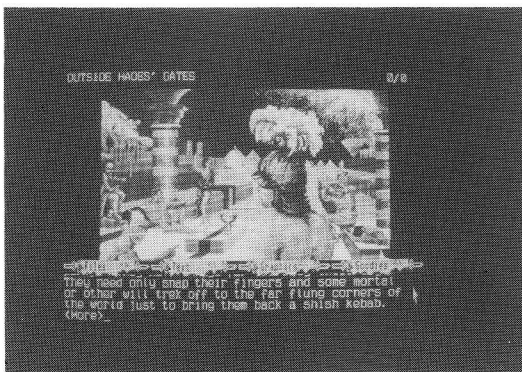
I missed the train.



...HELLO...MAGNETIC WHO?...OUR GAME?...OH NO...OH WELL, I'M SURE WE CAN GET SOMEONE TO MAKE SOMETHING UP...NO WORRIES...

With trouble looming over the delayed release of Official Secrets' exclusive Magnetic Scrolls game, only one person could possibly come to the rescue; only one woman who was brave enough to tell our members the truth, one woman who could drag our credibility from the brink of despair, one woman who could save us as we tottered on the path of despair. And that woman is... Agent Kane, why are you hiding under the desk?...

Our EXCLUSIVE GAME is Not To Be MYTHed.



After several attempts to record his pearls of wisdom on my t...rusty old tape recorder, I abandoned 'technology' in favour of my more reliable pen and notepad. This is what he told me...well I think it is...if you saw my scribbled notes you'd understand my dilemma. Anyway, here's the info...

The software specialists down at Magnetic Scrolls believe that there is a place in the leisure market for serial adventure games.

These would work along similar lines to television soap operas, with one episode (or mini-game) following on from the last one. (No it doesn't mean that we're about to be snowed-under with software from down-

under!) Paul and the rest of the team are very keen to have some feedback from players since future serial games will depend totally on them receiving a positive and enthusiastic response. So remember -if you do/don't like the sample game please write in and let us know. Send your comments either to CONFIDENTIAL or direct to Mag Scrolls (you'll find the address at the end of the article).

Anyway, having come up with the initial concept they then developed the idea of doing an adventure series based on the antics of the Greek gods. So, Myth (the exclusive freebie game for CONFIDENTIAL readers) is just the first of many (I hope) in the Greek god anthology.

Sorry, sorry, sorry...grovel, grovel, grovel...once again the Mercurial ways of the programming fraternity mean that, much to CONFIDENTIAL's chagrin, the promised, exclusive (or do I mean elusive?) mini-game from Magnetic Scrolls won't be winging its way to you until after Christmas. But don't despair...it's worth waiting for and by Jove, we'll definitely (Gods willing) be sending it seperately as soon as it arrives with us. Meanwhile, we have wangled another exclusive, Iris to Iris interview with Paul Findley, in which he reveals the reasons for the game's inception, as well as some teasing tit-bits to tantalise, and hopefully pacify, our frustrated adventurers. With all these journalistic interruptions no wonder it's taking him so long to finish his Olympian task....I hear you say.

To give our faithful readers some more behind-the-scenes, Confidential information I ventured off to Paul's luxurious penthouse office, near the Tower of London, with the intention of getting a story from him come Hell or high water. Once I had him cornered he had no option but to spill the beans. With the spotlight directed straight between his eyes, I asked Paul what had first prompted him (apart from having to urn a living) to do this mini-game.



In our first issue Nick provided a vague-ish description (so as not to give the game away, as it were) of the basic scenario...with the proviso that, programmers being a notoriously capricious breed, things might well be quite different in the finished game. I am assured that, although there are a few finishing touches to be made to the game, the storyline remains virtually intact and unscathed. For those who have recently joined Official Secrets and haven't seen Nick's God-piece (if you know what I mean), I'll just give a brief recap. I won't be too specific either, in case it Mars your enjoyment.

The game is set in Ancient-ish Greece, and revolves around the notion that the mortal Greeks, being a fickle breed (like programmers really) have become disenchanted with the current bunch of Olympian Gods and are looking elsewhere for new modes of worship. Ignored by their former worshippers, the Gods become bored, complacent and generally Idyll. Not surprisingly Zeus, the top God, is none too pleased with this turn of events and decides to reinstate the Olympian deities to their former positions of glory. But, being that he's a devious

chap he decides, that he's going to make them work hard to regain the respect of the idolatrous Greeks.

So, one night at an Heroic symposium, Zeus decides to turn the tables on the revelling Gods. He commands that, in order to win back the respect of the disaffected worshippers, each God in turn must prove that they are worthy of being adored by completing an Heroic task. You're playing the part of the sea-god Poseidon, but being more than a little inept at aquatic acrobatics, have the misfortune to be chosen first (the Leda?). Your objective... to Tri and Dent the defences of Hades' palace which, funnily enough, is located in that god-forsaken place itself, Hades. Your aim is to steal away with Hades' magical Helmet..

But, just when you Thor that task didn't sound too difficult, you discover that, in order to gain access to Hades, you have to figure out how to bypass the Hydra. And water task that turns out to be! A fearsome, many-headed serpent, the Hydra proves to be a formidable adversary. Even if you manage to chop off any one of its multifarious heads, your efforts will be wasted because it simply regenerates

new ones. When you eventually get into Hades' subterranean domain you have to traverse the Styx...but be warned... Charon must be bought-off, and guess who has to pay the Stygian ferryman? Once you've crossed the river of hell (and Charon!?!), you have to make your way to Hades' Palace. In transit to the Palace you will be dogged by many perplexing problems. Eventually, having survived all these perilous encounters and solved several Cthonic conundrums you should eventually reach the Palace gates where the final task should keep YOU (little hint Hera) baffled for a while.

All in all Myth is an entertaining and witty little masterpiece which will keep you aMused for many an hour.

Once again our sincerest Apollo..gies for the delay...and the puns...but it's difficult not to when you're in the Centaur of things..oops!

Please send comments on Myth to Paul Findley at Magnetic Scrolls, 1 Chapel Court, London, SE1 1HH.



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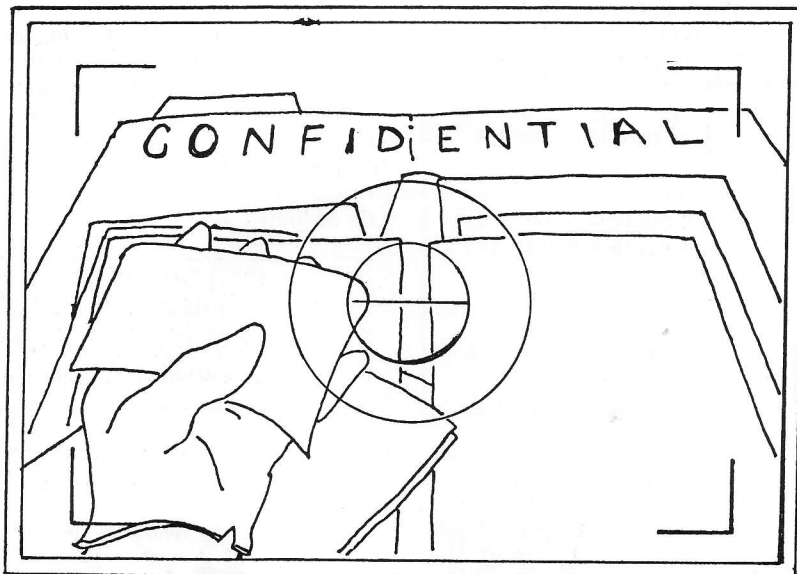
CHAIN MAIL READY MADE OR D.I.Y.
S.A.E. for catalogue

...AGENT BARNFIELD HAS MISTAKENLY EATEN THE WRONG FOLDER OF SECRET DOCUMENTS...NOW WE HAVE TWO PAGES SHORT!...RUSTLE UP SOMETHING PRONTO...

Of all the submissions we require for future issues of this magazine, the most sought after is in this section. Called 'CONFIDENTIAL PAPERS', we will hopefully be printing short stories sent in by our members. June Rowe's entry below came first in a CRASH Competition and for her efforts won a Daisy Wheel Printer. Now we cannot offer such grand rewards, but if we do publish them, we may be able to prise some little thing from the grasp of The Boss Upstairs. Yet for now, read on and enjoy...

HARRY'S HEAVEN

A SHORT STORY BY JUNE ROWE



With his hands in his pockets and his shoulders hunched against the bitter wind, Harry mooched dejectedly past the shops, feeling sorry for himself. Another day to face, and still no possibility of getting a job.

However, he was not so wrapped up in his misery that he did not notice where he was walking...as he approached the corner of the High Street, he perked up, because here was a shop where he could at least day-dream a little and forget his troubles for a short time.

As he looked through the glass his eyes went immediately to the disc drive sitting in the middle of the window. He tried not to look at the price tag; after months on the dole, he knew he couldn't afford it, but he let his thoughts run wild on the delights of owning it.

After a few moments, he gave a little sigh of resignation and shifted his gaze to the interior of the shop, where a young boy was playing a game. By putting his face close and shading his eyes, Harry could just manage to read the words on the screen... "as you drop the soggy banana skin, the approaching monster slips on it and with a blood-curdling shriek, falls headlong into the chasm. Just before it disappears forever, the monster drops a

large bronze key on the ground at your feet."

Harry's whole demeanour altered instantly - purely by chance, he had just seen the answer to a problem he had been struggling with. This was the adventure he was currently playing on his Spectrum, and that monster had been killing him regularly twice-nightly for a fortnight!

Excitedly he spun round and started heading for home, thinking, "This must be my lucky day! So *that's* what the banana skin was for! Then that must be the key to the locked door by the..."

A woman suddenly screamed in terror - and with a screech of brakes, a speeding car went out of control, mounted the pavement and crushed Harry against the shop front.

Someone said shakily, "The poor devil didn't have a chance! It was all over in a few seconds - he didn't even see it coming!" A crowd quickly gathered, to stare in horror at Harry's mortal remains and the bloodstained front of the wrecked car. A policeman arrived and efficiently took charge, ascertaining that Harry was dead and calling for help for the injured driver.

Meanwhile, somewhere else, Harry walked uncertainly in a misty cloud towards a large pair of gates on which he could see a notice and a bell. He didn't know where he was, but the notice said "Ring for attention", so, after only a moment's hesitation, he did so. The gates were opened instantly, by a dark-haired, pleasant looking young man wearing a sports jacket and grey flannel trousers.

He smiled and greeted Harry with "Hallo Harry, pleased to meet you. Do come in! I'm your courier, and it is my job to show you around and make sure you are..." he gave a short cough, then finished..."happy."

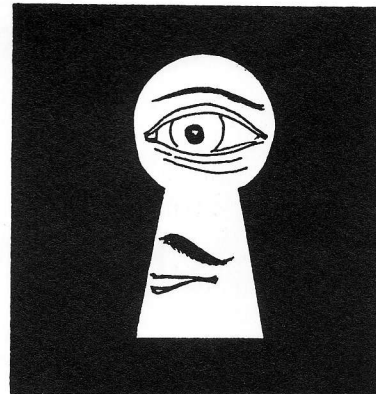
"Nasty cough you have there, er, um...what do I call you, Mr. er, er...?" enquired Harry nervously.

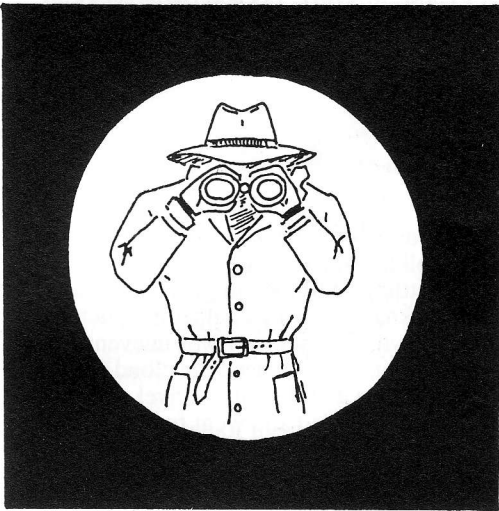
"Oh we're not at all formal here, Harry," replied the courier. "You can call me B.L."

Feeling somewhat reassured, Harry asked tentatively, "Can you tell me where we are, B.L.?"

The courier grinned and shook his head. "There's no need for me to tell you that, Harry. As soon as you've seen the amenities here, you'll know where you are, without a doubt. Now, if you'd like to follow me, I'll show you around."

With a growing feeling of relief, Harry followed the courier down a gravelled path which led into an avenue of shops. The first shop they came to had





a window full of computers and accessories.

Harry stopped and asked, "Could we go in this shop, please, B.L.? I had a computer before I... Well, anyway, I'd like to see what adventure games the shop has in stock, if you wouldn't mind."

"Certainly Harry," the courier said, opening the door and ushering him into the shop. "By the way, there's no charge for anything here. We don't bother with money. Choose whichever computer you like, or two or three if you want to, and whatever else you fancy."

"Jeepers!" thought Harry happily, "I must be in Heaven if I can have anything I want without paying for it!"

Inside the shop, Harry saw joyfully that there were all the computers ever invented - Spectrum, Commodore, BBC, Atari, Amstrad and many more. There were arrays of printers, all neatly labelled with the name of the computer they belonged to, and on a rack of shelves against one wall, all the add-ons Harry had ever seen advertised. There were joysticks, light pens, disc drives, all sorts of interfaces and cassette recorders (with and without counters!) by the dozen.

Harry couldn't believe his eyes! He turned to speak to the courier, and nearly fainted from shock when he saw the fourth wall of the shop. It was lined from floor to ceiling with racks of game tapes and discs!

"We have every piece of software and hardware there is, Harry", said the courier proudly. "As soon as anything is released, we have it. Now, if you'd like to take what you want and put it on the table there, the things will be delivered to your quarters. We have an instant delivery service - everything is very convenient."

Almost crowing with delight, Harry picked up a Spectrum 128 and placed

it on the table. To his amazement, it shimmered into a haze and disappeared!

"Hey, B.L. what happened to that?" he cried.

"Instant delivery service, as I told you," the courier said calmly. "You like the Spectrum, I see. We didn't know exactly which computer you favoured, owing to a slip-up in communications, so I'll adjust the tapes for you."

He lifted his hand and pointed at the racks of games, and as the bemused Harry watched in utter rapture, *Master of Magic* for the CBM64 turned into *Swords and Sorcery* for the Spectrum, *Strangeloop* for the Amstrad changed into the Spectrum version and *HyperRally* for the MSX became *Winter Sports* for the Spectrum.

"There you are, Harry - take your pick," the courier said, then, looking at his watch, he went on, "I don't want to rush you but there are other arrivals scheduled, and I would like to show you over your quarters and make sure you are settled in and orientated."

Harry apologised, making some remark about everything being so wonderful, then quickly grabbed a disc drive, a handful of discs, a cassette recorder and a dozen or so adventure games and put them on the table. He was so excited about his good fortune that after the first few items, he didn't even bother to watch them shimmer into nothing.

Finally, he reluctantly left the shop and followed his guide through an alley which brought them to a wide expanse of neatly mowed lawn, surrounded by modern buildings.

He was led into a luxuriously furnished, detached bungalow, which the courier told him would be his own personal residence.

"The bedroom is through there," said the courier, glancing again at his watch, "There is a self-making bed, so you won't have any bother with that, and the bathroom is next to it. There's always a liberal supply of hot water here. You must forgive me if I don't give you a full tour, but I am rather pushed for time. This is the dining room - you see the serving hatch over there? Just dial for anything you want in the way of food or drink, at any time day or night. Press that button on the table when you've finished, and the dishes will

be taken away. And here is your leisure room."

Eyes popping, Harry walked into the leisure room to see his computer, with disc drive and cassette recorder already connected, sitting on a large table. There was a 22" colour TV set just at the right distance from the comfortable swivel chair drawn up in front of it. On the side of the table stood a rack containing the games Harry had chosen, and to the left of the chair was an adjustable trolley table, complete with Print 'n' Plot Adventure planner and a row of pens, pencils and coloured felt-tips.

"You are left-handed, aren't you Harry? Yes, I thought we'd got that right. Well, I'll leave you to it then..."

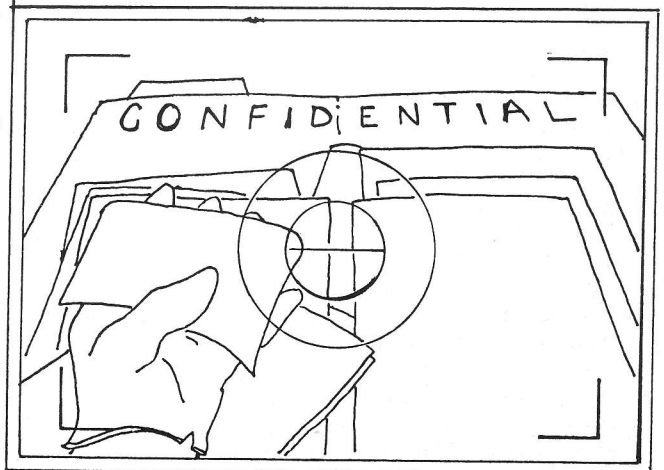
The courier carried on talking, but Harry wasn't listening.

"HEAVEN! I must be in Heaven! There's everything here I ever dreamed of having!" he thought ecstatically, as the courier's voice continued... "There's been a pile-up on the M1, and I'm expecting a coach-load of drunken football hooligans - they'll take some handling."

As the courier turned to leave, Harry suddenly noticed that there was something missing...

"Before you go, B.L...." he said hesitantly, "I hope you won't mind my mentioning it. I don't want you to think I'm ungrateful or that I'm criticising anything, but I can't see a power point. Where do I plug things in, please?"

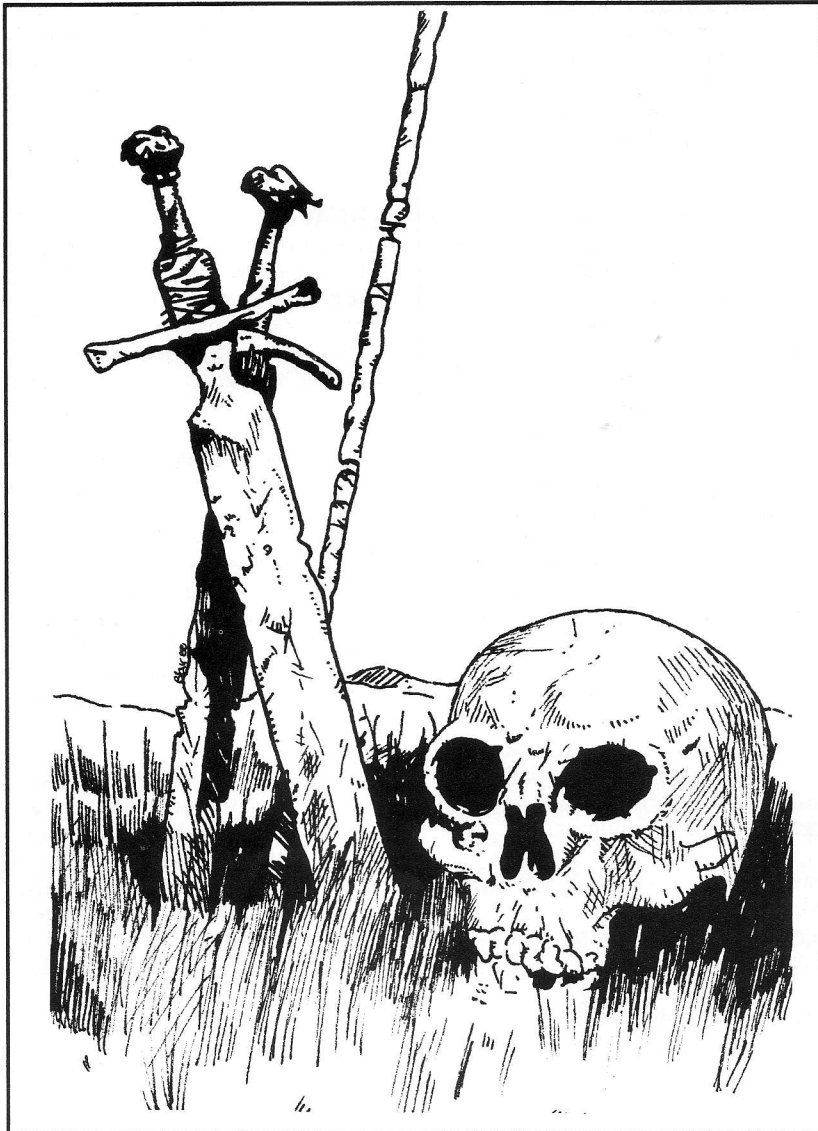
The courier's lips curled into a sardonic grin. He gave a diabolic chuckle, then as he slowly disintegrated into a cloud of evil-smelling yellow smoke, Harry heard him say, "I said you'd know where you were as soon as you saw the amenities, Harry. There's no electricity here - that's the HELL of it!"



"...COME IN AGENT MORKO...MISSION TO INFILTRATE THE CRAZY DWARF...I WANT THE WHOLE GANG BUSTED...TAKE NO PRISONERS..."

AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE CRAZY DWARF

And so Agent Morko set off for the Sussex Downs where dwelt the lair of 'The Crazy Dwarf', one of the latest additions to the live role-playing groups in Britain. The Master Spy decided that more should be found out about this band. Yet perhaps this member of the team was not the most suitable choice. Yes, so he may have inherited his father's trusty sword, yet it came together with Papa's long yellow streak too...



IT WAS nearing dark and the fading light created a murky atmosphere under the trees. Slowly our party pushed their way through some bushes and set out across the wide area of scrubland. I was beginning to feel very nervous and expected an ambush at any moment. The surroundings certainly provided ample opportunity and so did a group of three orcs who came creeping out towards us. As this was early on in the adventure, I thought a general bout of cowardice was called for, so I moved a little back. In fact, I moved a lot back and took cover fast! I could see a couple of our party handle the creatures very well, and once

they were dead, I went forward again. Yet to my horror another group appeared and again I leapt backwards to safety. One of our number - a half-orc named Cro - told me to go forward as I was a warrior. Poo to him, I'm not getting killed too early on.

The carpet arrives

After this second set of orcs was slain, we saw a dark figure just ahead, dressed in a fine robe. We greeted the stranger (who was apparently a Spell-binder) and he offered us a quest to return an amulet to him. This didn't sound too difficult, until he mentioned that it was lost within a castle in the

sky, and his smile when he started to unroll his magic carpet was quite unsettling. Still he did give everyone 50 rakna each which helped to quieten us down. The journey was uneventful, but soon we saw ahead the cloud city. Amidst an awful bout of travel sickness, we landed and went forward to engage the guards who stood at the huge gates. I was at the back of the group as usual and watched the others engage and kill the men without much difficulty.

Everything goes yellow...

Beyond the bodies we came across a woman dressed in yellow garments. I sensed danger and made sure that if anything happened I could get away as fast as possible. I was prepared for anything - well almost anything - for at that moment she waved her hands and began to incant strange spells. For she was a Yellow Elemental; a strange being whose only attack seems to be to turn your weapons into bananas! I ran up the path just behind two of the other party members (I think they were called Morodun and Kyvala - but I didn't get to know anyone really well at all). They said all I had to do was not believe in her and she couldn't do anything to my weapons. This might have been true, but I personally didn't want to enter foray to find out.

Demons of the air

So we three just stood there on the path watching the rest of the party battling it out with the woman. After a bit of hacking and slaying, the Elemental was no more and so we set off again and soon came to a bench. This, we were told, had magical resting power over anyone who sat in it. Well, I doubted that very much, but we all dived for it anyway; we certainly needed a rest. After a short while, we carried on our way. I was in quite high spirits by this time and thought, in the next encounter I will definitely help the party in battle. The next encounter came soon enough - Cloud Demons! I found I had lied and ran in the opposite direction.

Darkness falls

Once these were killed (a very difficult task, involving much attacking and running away), we pushed ourselves onward, hoping that the end was near. By now it was beginning to get quite dark and night was well on its way. We had only a couple of torches to light our way and things began to look very ominous. Just then we were ambushed for the second time. Out of the blackness came a cry of 'THUNDERBOIT!' and as I fled, everyone

this time followed.



Rolling thunder

I had no idea who that hit, but no one went back for a few minutes until the air had cleared. The scouts informed us that the figure was a Light Warrior, and while I didn't know what a Light Warrior was, I was not going to go in and find out. So while the others charged I watched them from the back. Mass chaos reigned, for the warrior was throwing around magic as if it were going out of fashion. Thunderbolts followed spells of enchanted sleep and all manner of other flashes and bangs. One of the party (a Spellbinder I believe - now what was his name?) suggested that he could cast a spell on me that would make me go berserk. This had several drawbacks, one of them being the possibility that I could die! Quite remarkably I gave it some serious thought, but while I was doing so the party managed to kill the Light Warrior off. Phew!

The cloud disappears

It was then that someone noticed that the cloud on which we were standing was disintegrating around us so we hurried along and were set upon by more guards. This was the moment when I first experienced the thrill of close combat. I waved my mighty sword and cleaved heads all around me. This is what Adventuring life is all about! It was sadly over too soon and while I was coming down from this high, everyone else was robbing the bodies!

The journey home

This meant that when the magic carpet came to take us home, I only had the money that I was given at the beginning of the adventure. With much gnashing of my teeth, I got on the rug and we set off - without the amulet after all. There was much shuffling about as the carpet descended and when we were about fifty feet from the ground a couple of the group trying to push people off. I saw Cro being attacked and feared for my own life, but I managed to slip off as the carpet touched the ground. Of the fifteen Adventurers who had started out, only one had been lost (I never found out who he was either) and he had his throat slit by Cro.

Where is the amulet?

When the Spellbinder appeared again and asked for his amulet, everyone looked around in an embarrassed fashion trying not to look too awkward. Yet while this was all happening, one of the party members crept up to the robed figure and handed him something. The man then gave something back in return and then promptly disappeared. We never saw him again, but the others began milling around. I began to feel extremely worried (as is my wont) and some of the group were

beginning to give me nasty looks. No one trusted anyone it seemed and without the threat of attacks, the party turned against itself. In the eerie night, I decided that I would rather have very little money rather than a very slit throat, so I ran. I only just made it back and the day's adventuring would certainly be an experience I would never forget.

Overview

I can see a promising future for 'The Crazy Dwarf'. With expansion to other areas of countryside, they will do extremely well. One piece of advice: If you ever adventure with them, wear a chainmail gorget (which protects the neck from having your throat cut). Also, as most of the characters are evil, it is best not to declare any treasure you may have happened upon along on the way.

The Rulebook

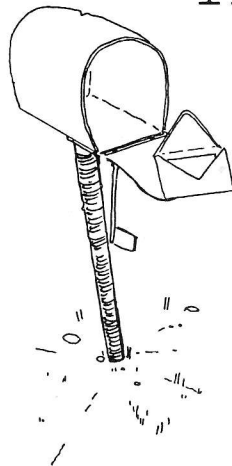
Unlike Labyrinthe (which was reviewed in the last issue), this system does not have a glossy Rulebook nor set playing area, but this will no doubt change when 'Crazy Dwarf' becomes more popular. In some ways the rules are very much in the same vein as Labyrinthe, in fact almost to the point of being compatible. Yet they have tried to make improvements on the general LRP system, for example in the field of skills and a few of the spells. Though when it comes down to it, this has all the traditional hallmarks

of any typical LRP. Not necessarily a bad thing, for the rules are only a means to an end, but still a point worthy of comment.

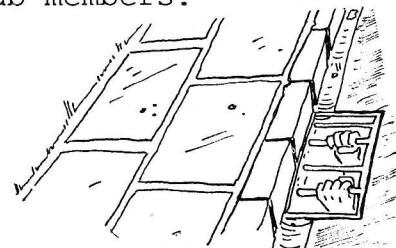
The Adventures

Which brings me to the crux of any LRP set-up; how good are the adventures? For a start, the GamesMasters certainly create the right atmosphere. The adventure that Morko was involved with could have had more problems and less fighting, but the general attitude of the day was a good one. The whole evening's quest took place in forests and on paths with a marvellous natural feeling that only the countryside can provide. Whoever thought of doing a visit to a cloud city when all around is dense woodland certainly deserves a pat on the back for daring (if not for practicality). Apart from this, the people behind 'Crazy Dwarf' are setting up and running these days for the sheer pleasure of it, not really as a serious business venture. In fact, the GMs are involved in running a shop (also called CD) and this sells all sorts of role-playing products, as well as making armour and weapons to customers' specifications. Adventures take place every other Sunday, but to check on any particular point raised in this review, they can be contacted at the shop address, which is: 50 Broadwater Road, Worthing, West Sussex, BN14 8AG or phone Worthing 30023.

THE DEAD LETTERBOX



In the next issue of CONFIDENTIAL, we will be opening up our own spy network for anyone who wants to get in contact with any other club member. This will take the form of a noticeboard where you can leave messages, make contacts and generally place whatever you wish to see in it. It will be called 'The Dead Letterbox', which is a place where spies like us leave information for others to collect. So write in today and we will include it in the near future. What better way is there of keeping in touch with all the hundreds of other club members?



...WE ARE A PAGE SHORT...FIND SOMEONE TO FILL IT...MAKE SURE THEY ARE AVAILABLE, FUNNY AND CHEAP...NO-ONE?...



REAL LIFE BLUES...



By Michael Bywater

I HAVE A CONFESSION to make: I do not like puzzles. Any puzzles.

Puzzles in real life are bad enough. They are invariably badly designed and very dull, and, what's more, they take hours to work out. But the worst thing is that, no matter how you cudgel your brains, the solution is always wrong. In the end, Access sends the men round to take away the television, the other guy gets the girl, the exhaust *does* drop off halfway to Basingstoke, your enemy gets the job and you get the sack, and just as you're leaving the house, the pimple on your nose makes up his mind, puts its back into it and sits there glowing like a Belisha Beacon all evening.

This is all said to be part of Life's Rich Tapestry. Frankly, I could do with a bit more of Life's Comfy Old Blue Jeans. But it is not to be. So why, in moments of relaxation, do so many of us feel drawn to turn on the computer, boot up a game, and spend interminable hours locked in combat with even more and even worse problems?

I suppose there are advantages. You can't turn off the man who writes whining letters about your overdraft, but you can turn off your shifty, crooked partner in *Corruption*. When you have finally got into the Menhir Room in *Zork II*, you can at least move on; whereas once you've solved one of your horrible real life problems, you are *exactly where you were before it raised its ugly head*. And if you can't stand any more enemy ships in *Gato*, you can tell them to 'Quit', and they will. Try doing that to your boss. Sure, *you* can quit, but it's hardly the same thing.

Best of all is *Crystal Quest*. If the Annoyers get too annoying, you can pause, change mode, and Edit the bastards, taking away their power, their intelligence, their weaponry and their safety-in-numbers. No such luck in real life. When you emerge from your room to find three traffic wardens hunched squawking around your car, you can't simple Edit them into nice old ladies, and if you threatened as much you'd find not only three traffic wardens but three burly men in white coats and a van, helping you into a latex waistcoat and it's hey-ho for the rubber room.

Those who say that games are good for us claim that they give us control and the chance of success. I wouldn't deny that those are two things generally unavailable in real life, but I'm not

sure that they are good for us. On the contrary, I'd say, computer games drive you mad.

If you are one of those people -- reflexes like Rambo, a six-figure IQ and a head the size of a pumpkin -- who always wins, you will find real life so frustrating in comparison that you will, before long, jump in your tracks and start barking in the street. If, on the other hand, you are, like me, terminally inept, the frustration of constantly losing at games as well as real life becomes intolerable. Consequence? You fall out of your tree and, once again, start barking in the street.

You only really have three choices. First, never do anything else except play games. You'll never encounter real life and so you'll be able to stay sane. But you won't be able to do anything with your sanity because you'll be shut in your room. It would be much more fun to go raving mad in your room, so this solution is fundamentally unsatisfactory.

The second choice is to play games a lot of the time, spend some time in the real world, go mad and become a game writer. This is partly satisfactory because, again, nobody will notice on the grounds that all games writers are completely whacko. Their brains are sozzled on code and coffee, one day merges into the next, and if you ever look one in the eyes, you get a frightening glimpse into a surrealistic world which most of us would rather not know about. On this basis, one more fruitcake will make no difference, but do you honestly want to spend the rest of your life among people who are, without exception, a brick short of a load? In other words, this option is also unsatisfactory.

Finally, your third choice is *never to play another computer game*. True, you'll have to cope with real life, and, true, you'll have no fun; but the little men in the Traffic Offences Department at the Town Hall cope with real life and have no fun, and look at them. Yes; this solution is unsatisfactory too.

You will notice that all these three solutions are unsatisfactory. This is Real Life rearing its ugly head. Real Life, by the way, is unsatisfactory too.

Years ago, a dreadful woman published a book encouraging other women to be frightfully seductive and ring their menfolk up at work to say "Come home, darling, I need your body." This foolish idea was greeted

with universal scorn, but it did give one pause for thought. What would it be like if it really happened? A colleague of mine decided that, under those circumstances, a new sort of bordello would spring up in every town, except instead of young ladies in scanty underwear, they would be staffed with old frumps like Sybil in *Fawlty Towers*. Businessmen harassed by their over-enthusiastic wives would sneak off, pay their £30 and spend a relaxing hour being nagged about sprouts, the price of meat and so forth.

This is the way forward in computer games. What we want is something un-taxing, almost dreary, very much like life itself *except that you can win slightly more often*. Something where you spend most of your time shuffling around in a sort of gloomy daze, half-dead, seething with barely-articulated resentment without being asked to do foolish things. I mean, how often in the course of the average working day do you *GET SHOE FROM SACK THEN GET LACE FROM SHOE AND TIE IT TO DYNAMITE. BURN MOLESKIN VEST WITH OIL-LAMP, LIGHT LACE WITH MOLESKIN VEST...*? Life isn't like that. It's more like:

>AVOID THE BUSKER

You step onto a paving-stone improperly maintained by the Council. Water squelches up your leg.

>CURSE THE COUNCIL

The Council does not hear you. The busker sniggers into his harmonica.

That's the stuff. No puzzles, no clever nonsense, just a continuous drizzle of petty humiliation, except that, every now and then, there would be a small triumph, as in:

>CURSE THE COUNCIL

The Council does not hear you. The busker sniggers into his harmonica. His sniggering dislodges a loose reed which goes down the wrong way. Choking, he falls to the ground and his harmonica embeds itself in his ape-like forehead.

Wouldn't it be fun? And no withdrawal symptoms, nor any risk of lunacy. I am prepared to open negotiations for the World Rights with any interested parties right now. Bearing in mind my lifestyle, my demands are modest. Two white mice, a year's supply of Cup-A-Soup and an Uzi sub-machine gun should do the trick.

Michael Bywater is the Assistant Editor of Punch magazine and has also written adventure games for Infocom and Magnetic Scrolls.

...I DON'T SEE ANY PUZZLES, AGNET WEATHERLEY...WHERE ARE THEY?...DO YOU WANT OUR AGENTS' BRAINS TO GET LAZY...WELL?...

CRYPTIC CROSSWORD

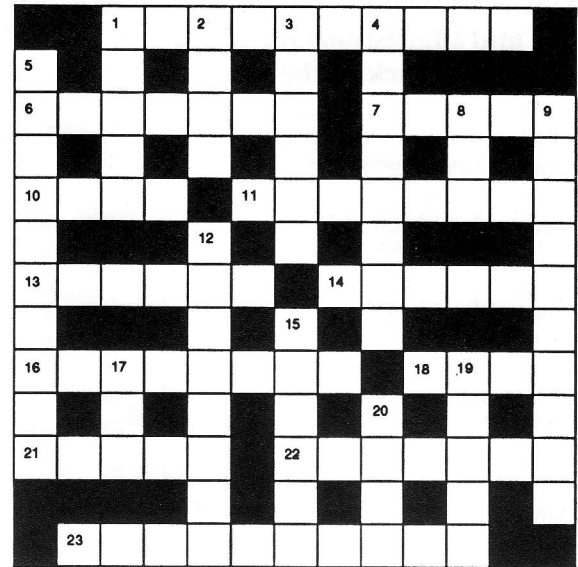
By Clive.

ACROSS

1. What zebras do to old soap? 4 possible exits...(10)
6. Woven rug link creates Infocom's horror. (7)
7. If the characters are confused, he'll steal their gold! (5)
10. Provides the ups and downs of the toy industry. (4)
11. A rich and muddled species appearing in Spidertronic perhaps. (8)
13. Rodney, move! Over there! (6)
14. Caspar serves to conceal the syntax analyser. (6)
16. Shoot-em-up sounds like a knight's wardrobe illumination. (8)
18. Glaswegian spins coin on table. Heads! (4)
21. Low-down dance in no-man's-land. (5)
22. Colour of bath and basin as a matching pear? (7)
23. Gamer's Christmas calendar initially upsets king and queen. (10)

DOWN

1. One of The Three Stooges - not the straight man! (5)
2. Love with German? Leave it out! (4)
3. As sweet and sickly as an Amstrad? (6)
4. Paisley is under the whisky measure. He'll provide the glasses. (8)
5. My pal Billy, a crazy fan of postal games. (4,2,4)
8. Hostelry in the North. (3)
9. Trade if one forms band of free traders. (10)
12. Affairs in Plundered Hearts are all over, but true affection lies within. (4,4)
15. Troubled artist, one of many for Knopfler. (6)
17. Keep her quiet. (3)
19. Seat a hundred at a sixties musical. (5)
20. Ultima perhaps, or how many books in Adams's trilogy. (4)



The senders of the first five correct crossword solutions will receive vouchers off our eight-hundred games in our current catalogue.

THE WIZARD'S COTTAGE

By John.

So you have stumbled across the cottage in the wood, have you? Well, well, well. Such a curious place - and magical too if you are not mistaken. So the legend tells, anyone who unlocks its secrets will inherit whatever artefact lies at its centre. Yet first you must gain entrance and then pass each of the elements to reach its heart. Many have tried, but no one has yet succeeded. What mysteries and tests lie within that innocuous exterior? None have returned to tell, but most cannot even pass the first door of the five that lie within.

The following puzzle is to be approached as you would any ordinary Adventure game. Read the description and then decide which seven commands will allow you entry into the mysterious cottage. Note well, that you may not need all seven. Feel free to try several approaches if you have commands left over.

Grassy Clearing.

The cottage is set in a wide clearing within the forest's dark enchanted bounds. The glen is roughly fifty paces from side to side and rises to form a knoll in the centre. This is where the house stands. Towards the edge of the glen the grasses are tall and wave lazily in the breeze, yet the ground around the building is sparse and patchy. And any nearer than that nothing grows at all. A sullen cow gazes at you as

building, unhurriedly munching what little grass there is.
 >inventory
 You are empty-handed!
 >examine house
 From the outside the house looks quite plain and unremarkable. Its dimensions are small, being fifteen paces long by ten wide, and you can easily reach the eaves if you stand on the tips of your toes. The walls are constructed of grey stone with a chimney facing the trees. The roof is straw thatched and hangs over the side like a mass of blond hair that is in need of much cutting. Fronted by a single step, a wooden door, inset with brass fixtures, stands proudly in the centre of the house, flanked by two leaded windows. A third window stands above the door, half-hidden by the tatty thatching. Apart from this, the rest of the walls are grey and featureless.

>enter house
 Moving closer toward the odd cottage, you come before the door and try to enter, but the door will not budge. Glinting in the afternoon sunlight, a brass sign catches your attention near the handle. Below the doorknob is an overly-large keyhole, and a rectangular opening marked: **Letters**
 >read sign

It reads: **Please Knock And Enter**
 >knock on door then open it
 You knock, but there is no answer. You try the door again, but it is as stubborn as before.
 >look in opening
 Being nosey, you push open the flap and peer in. And sure enough,

you look over the

whoever the occupant of this humble dwelling is, they have some mail. It is in the form of a parchment scroll.

>take scroll and read it
 You manage to squeeze your hand into the opening and pull out the screwed up piece of parchment.

Unrolling it, you read: **Pass The Door**

(Hmmm...very helpful. I am sure that's what you are trying to do).

>examine step
 Glancing down at your feet, you find that you are, in fact, standing on the step. This is totally unremarkable, save for the fact that two glass bottles have been left out for some erstwhile delivery. Both are empty, but wedged between them is a tiny note.

>take note and read it
 Still feeling curious, you pick it up and scan its message: **Milk In Order (2)**

Just as you had thought, it is for the milkman! But then you think again. Ha! Now you see what you must do. Laughing out loud, you drop the note and...Well that is for you to discover! Send in your solution to John Trevillian at the usual address.

Write all your answers as adventure commands (ie. if you think the way to enter the house is to throw the bottle at the door then reply: >take bottle >throw bottle at door) Good luck! And as an incentive there will be a draw of the correct answers and the five chosen will win vouchers off our already half-price games! This puzzle is a series of five - and if you get all five correct, then there will be a major prize for the taking. Now who out there thinks they are a match for this fiendish cottage?

FOR YOUR EYES ONLY...

The CONFIDENTIAL Letters File

Ring! Ring! -click- "Calling all our agents! This is YOUR club. This is YOUR magazine. We need your help, contributions, letters, comments and suggestions for the future. Send all correspondence to: The Man in Black at the usual OFFICIAL SECRETS office."

Dear OS,
Congratulations on your first edition of CONFIDENTIAL. This is what we adventurers have been waiting for since the demise of Micro Adventurer. I read my copy from cover to cover and thoroughly enjoyed it. One small criticism with the contents, however. Has Mel Croucher finally lost his marbles? If you are going to include a Help Page, let's be serious about it. We can read infantile drivel any time in the monthly computer magazines; you know the ones I'm talking about. I realise you might not have much to put on a Letters Page in the first edition, but I'm sure you can do better than this. My second complaint concerns the postal charges for software orders. Why are you charging £2.50 per game for telephone orders and only £1.50 by post? I can see no reason for this. Phil Darke, Camberley.

The Man In Black says: Most of us find Mel Croucher's sense of humour tolerable most of the time and sometimes very amusing. Personally I thought the contribution added a necessary light-hearted page to the magazine. It's all down to taste. As for the charges, the telephone charge (which is now £2.00) includes paying for someone to answer the calls and write them down on an order form (which is done for us if you submit your own order) and the other charge is cost of the materials, actual postage and a handling charge. Even with all these added onto the cost of OS software, this still makes the games cheaper than any other legal source.

Dear OS,
...As far as I can see, you would have to be fairly silly not to join the Club as I have more than made up the cost of my subscription already with the purchase of three games. Mind you, I am an Amiga owner and the games do tend to be expensive in any case. But to be quite honest, I don't think I would have bought these games if I had to shell out the full price for them. By the way, I think you should set up a bulletin board, as I think it would be a great way of bringing members together...

Stuart Hunter, Harlow.

The Man In Black says: Glad you think the Club is living up to its promises, Stuart. As for your suggestion for a bulletin board, see page 29 for details. As with all the inclusions in the magazine, it is our readers' choice as to the direction we adopt. With such a select readership, we can honestly say that CONFIDENTIAL will grow to fulfil YOUR expectations.

Dear CONFIDENTIAL Team,
Am I right in assuming that your club is brand new? Well, so am I! I bought my PCW at the beginning of this year and was thoroughly hooked. Completely self-taught, I branched off into serious games (eg. draughts and chess) and I also took out a subscription on 8000-plus as I like the tongue-in-cheek humour and especially the articles by David Langford. However as I share my PCW with the youngest member of the family, I am usually required to help with drawing maps and solving rather difficult puzzles. *Mindfighter* was a downfall though! It is gathering dust at the moment for several reasons: first of all that dreadful novel. Then, how do you explain 'the anniversary' of someone's rape to a nine-year old? I began to understand why some un-hinged characters go round the bend and start shooting their nearest and dearest (as in the case of *Hungerford*). We also got rather fed-up with the monotony of mapping nuclear Southampton (although the graphics are superb!), apart from the fact that 'Robert' dies every other second. Also got fed up with characters saying 'Hi!' and nothing else. I gave up and if Jnr. solves it I'll let you know. But it's not my cup of tea...
Joyce Francis, Selsey.

The Man In Black says: I am glad that our membership includes people of every age (I will not reveal yours - this is after all Official Secrets...) As for Mindfighter, well all we can say is that in keeping with our policy of only stocking the best games available, this has been removed from our catalogue (except the PCW version). Your letter also raises a serious point about the content of such games as

this - perhaps these games should have warnings of their contents. Hungerford is indeed a topic that will affect everyone in the industry for a few years yet.

Dear Official Secrets,
Your envelope has arrived and the game is wonderful. Your prices are nice and getting better and better. So thank you for giving me the chance to be a member of the best club in Europe!! ...I hope that you understand my awful English! I only was in England once and to be precise in September. I was in Brighton and I passed a lot of time with Keith Campbell so expect a lot of adventure orders among the others.
Your Italian connection!
Marco Andreoli, Torino, Italy.

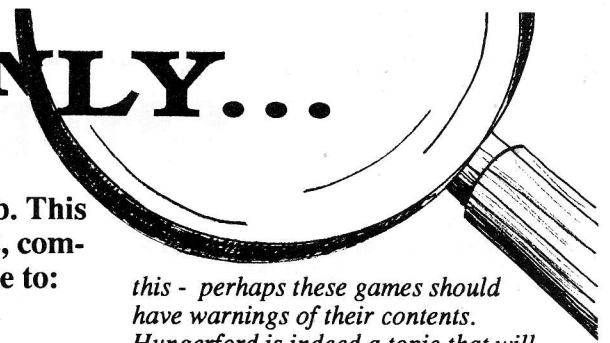
The Man In Black says: It is good to see the club reaching far and wide, Marco, and do not apologise for your English - I understood every word! Another member from abroad, this time West Germany...

Dear Sirs,
Your magazine is very good - no, great, and your Club too. It's very cheap; cheaper than in Germany! If you buy a game in Germany, you pay 80 to 100 Deutsche Marks - 30 pounds in Britain. About your magazine, there are enough detailed reports, but I feel that the following are missing: Hints, maps and questions for Adventures; News of the games scene, readers' letters; colour; and how do I program an Adventure on my computer (I have an Amiga).
Jochen Schwarz, West Germany.

The Man In Black says: Well, quite a few of your ideas already appear in this issue, as to Adventure hints and maps, these can be requested from us separately (we don't want to spoil these games for anyone). Colour may come as soon as our readership increases and watch these pages for articles on the workings of Adventure games.

"Well, that is all I have room for in this first letters page, but I'll meet you back here in two months' time for a further look at your views and comments. This is the Man In Black signing off..."

-click-brrrrrrrrrrrr-



WIN £500

worth of hardware

You choose it, and we'll buy it for you

Official Secrets is a club, right?

And if you're reading this, then you must be a member of Official Secrets. Yes?

(We're nothing if not smart, here on the CONFIDENTIAL Editorial Team.)

Let's not get too far into the 'a club is only as good as its members' business, but it does hold true... By the time you get round to reading this, you should have realised that we're eagerly waiting for your views and opinions. We're after letters – write to us if you disagree or even agree with the views put forward by our columnists. Let us have the benefit of your opinions on the world of computer gaming. We'd welcome a full-length feature from you, if there's one in there, bursting to get out.

But what about this £500? Well, we have tucked it away in a nice safe place, and a member of Official Secrets is going to win it next Spring. March 31st 1989 to be precise. (And if we're going to start being precise, the lucky member is going to be able to choose £500 worth of computer hardware and then we'll buy it for him or her.)

Lusting after one of the new 16-bit wonder machines? Drooling after a hi-res monitor and disk drive to upgrade your existing equipment? Or just plain greedy? Whatever your motivation, you could be enjoying the benefits of some nifty kit next year, and all for free.

So what do you have to do, to stand a chance of winning this prize? Ah yes, prize. This is a competition, not a raffle, after all.

Well, our hints department (all part of your membership of Official Secrets) could do with a bit of help. It's not that our team of experts is short of a brick or two when it comes to playing adventures or strategy games, it's just that we have so many available to members that our experts find it impossible to play through every game we offer. So it's back to the 'a club is only as good...' philosophy for a moment. The more solutions we have nestling in the filing cabinet, the better the service we can offer members – so if you've completed a game, why not share your expertise with other Official Secrets members?

Which is why we're giving away this luscious prize, by way of encouragement. To stand a chance of collecting, whizz us a solution (or two). We're looking for original, legible and pretty solutions – a few will be printed in forthcoming issues of CONFIDENTIAL, just to spur you all on.

Remember two things. One: the person who wins the prize is just as likely to be someone who sent in one, beautifully hand-crafted solution, complete in every detail as it is likely to be someone who has sent in dozens. Two: CONFIDENTIAL isn't available in the shops, so any old Tom, Dick or Harriet can't buy a copy and enter this competition. We don't sell 56, 60 or even 100 thousand issues. We only sell the magazine to subscribing members. So the odds are in your favour, as compared to competitions in other magazines...

**SEND YOUR ENTRIES TO:
CONFIDENTIAL HARDWARE COMPETITION
PO BOX 847, Harlow CM21 9PH**

And be quick about it. We've got some spot prizes for early birds!

BOB
WHERE WERE
YOU ???!
The BossUpstairs

